

MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



LEARNING: THE PATH TO PROVIDING EXCELLENT SERVICES

Our mission is clear: *“Our Citizen Volunteers will provide emotional first aid to survivors of tragedy in order to ease their immediate suffering and facilitate their healing and long-term recovery.”*

A word implied in our mission statement but not included is...**Excellent**. Our citizen volunteers will provide **excellent** emotional first aid to survivors. Not “OK” emotional first aid or “good” emotional first aid, but **excellent** emotional first aid.

I am sure we would all agree that our clients who are experiencing the worst time in their lives deserve the very best service from our TIP volunteers. And I’m sure we would also agree that our excellent reputation depends on providing excellent services.

Saying we provide excellent services is easier said than done. How can we ensure that we are providing excellent emotional first aid to our clients? Clearly providing excellent services is dependent on our TIP volunteers who are our service providers. Can we assume TIP volunteers who graduate from the TIP Academy are ready to provide excellent services? I don’t think so. I think that TIP volunteers graduate from the academy as “capable” helpers, but not yet “excellent” helpers.

I believe that the only way TIP volunteers become excellent TIP helpers is by doing the hard work of learning the best practices and subtle skills necessary to provide excellent service to clients. In other words, **ongoing learning leads to excellence**.

The responsibility of ensuring that our volunteers are continually learning is the responsibility of both TIP leaders and individual TIP volunteers.

TIP LEADERS create a “learning culture” that makes it possible for volunteers to continually learn by....

- Making continuing education meetings learning experiences by having relevant speakers and robust call sharing.
- Prompting volunteers on the call reports to report “*what I learned.*”
- Having a process of sharing with all volunteers what individual volunteers report learning i.e. spreading the learning.
- Making the debriefing of volunteers a learning experience.
- Conducting regular refresher trainings.
- Modeling learning i.e. “*here is what I learned recently*”

INDIVIDUAL TIP VOLUNTEERS can ensure ongoing learning by...

- Reviewing their volunteer training manual regularly.
- Attending all continuing education meetings.
- Asking themselves after every TIP call “*what did I learn?*”
- Asking for feedback from their mentors, partners and debriefers... “*How did I do?*” “*What could I have done better.*”?
- Studying the Resource Guide and being an “expert” in resources helpful to our clients.

The continuous learning process I am advocating is simple (but not easy.) It’s a matter of TIP leaders building a learning environment so that TIP volunteers can regularly add knowledge and skills to their TIP tool boxes.

The direct benefits to our clients of volunteers continually learning to “do it better” can be summed up in this recent statement by a TIP volunteer: “*At the last CE meeting I learned about draping a deceased veteran with a flag and playing taps on my phone. I was able to use that knowledge on my very next TIP call. The family of the veteran I helped was incredibly grateful that their loved one was treated with so much respect.*” It’s clear from this example that TIP Volunteer learning can lead directly to excellent client services.

We can’t kid ourselves. Unless volunteers are continually learning and leaders are making it possible for volunteers to learn, we can’t claim (as we do) to provide excellent services to our clients. The Volunteer Training Academy is not enough.