



“These activities are shit”

“I was a trainer in a communication training, and I had a group of 6-7 young people (20-22 years of age), all of them studied to be film/theatrical producers. The participants just started to get to know each other. To ease up the group a bit I wanted to start with an easy task that I’ve used successfully for years with different groups. I brought 10 cards from which each participant had to choose one. Some of the cards had drawings on them (e.g. a circle, a square, a triangle), some of them had an unfinished sentence on them (e.g. : My favourite book is....). The cards were designed to elicit stories or ideas from the participants, some of them asked about personal topics while others were about abstract topics.

Once participants chose a card, they had to speak about it for a short time in front of the group and then the group had to give feedback to the speaker (how they liked his/her presentation, what was good about it, how he/she could improve, etc). The first part of the activity went well – participants made great presentations about the cards. But they did not want to give feedback to each other at all. After the training was over I asked them to give me a written feedback about their thoughts and feelings of the training. One girl (let’s call her Magdi) wrote to me, that she did not like the training from the very beginning, as she didn’t like that she was asked to give feedback to people she barely knows, this is over her comfort zone. Furthermore, she will be the classmate of these people for a long time and she does not want to open up in front of them. She explained to me that in her group everyone competes with each other, and everyone wants to seem confident. She does not want to give feedback as she does not want to get feedback – she is too vulnerable for that. I was relieved to read this, felt that now I understand more what went wrong and felt moved by the honesty of Magdalena.

When we met again in a new training with this same group, I opened up a bit and apologized to the group that the first training did not go as planned. I made myself vulnerable to show an example for these young people. I told them that sometimes things don’t turn out the way we imagined, but it is not a tragedy, we can learn from our mistakes. I asked the group to have a discussion about this and discuss how our next training could be a good experience for them. At which point Magdi stood up and told to me:

“The activities of the past training were just shit, because they were not real, they were made up role plays. Let’s move on!””

IDENTITIES OF THE NARRATOR AND THE PERSON(S) TRIGGERING THE SHOCK

THE NARRATOR

Eszter is a 48 years old Hungarian and heterosexual woman. She is a trainer in a communication training with young people. She's also from the middle social class.

THE OTHER PERSON(S)

Magdi is a 22 years old Hungarian and heterosexual. She's a University student to film/theatrical producers. She is from the middle social class.

SIMILARITIES / DIFFERENCES

What brings them closer are their nationalities, their sexual orientations, their social class.

What separates them are their age, their education, their profession and their places in the workshop.

CONTEXT

PHYSICAL CONTEXT

Small training room

OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT

About 5 other trainees

They all studied how to be film/theatrical producers

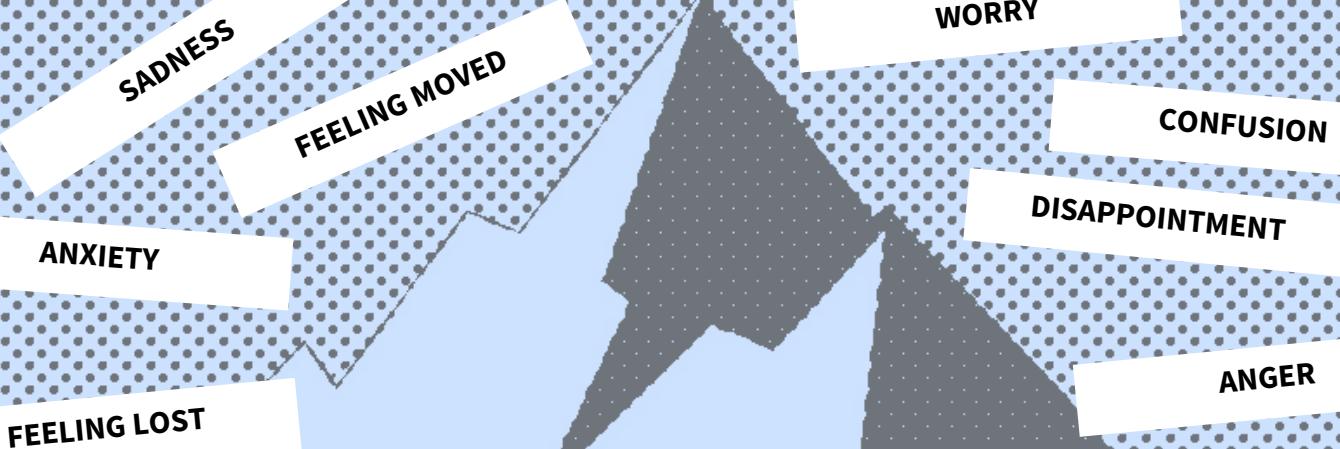
LARGER SOCIAL CONTEXT

« Communication trainings » are considered as relevant for a wide variety of professions, so they are often included in initial and continuous education. There is little uniformity in their scope and methodologies, approached and techniques are very diverse.

PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIP, ANTECEDENTS

Eszter and Magdi met for the first time during this training.

FRAME OF REFERENCES OF THE NARRATOR “Eszter”



During a reflection on the previous activities a participant declares: "These activities were shit. Move on!"

A communication training should teach how to open up and be honest: to teach “communication”, the best that a trainer could do is to teach people how to open up, be vulnerable and be honest. These are key competences in communication for Eszter, as they are essential to be able to learn about/from each other. She could not imagine how one can develop communication skills without these elements. She was feeling powerless teaching this to the group, they were not getting the message. They were not recognizing that these skills would be important in their future professional life.

Method to develop communication skills: Eszter thought that to learn about communication one must be able to become vulnerable, to give and take feedbacks

Participants should be open to experiment in trainings: they should experiment with being honest and vulnerable (as they can gain a lot from it). If they can open up in written form, they should be able to experiment with honesty face-to-face as well.

Importance of respectful communication: Eszter thought that in a training setting participants and trainers should talk to each other in a respectful way and she was a bit taken aback by Magdalena’s degrading language. The fact that Magdalena urged Esther to “move on” also represented disrespect (Magdalena did not accept that it is the trainer’s task to set the rhythm of the activities).

Identity as a successful trainer: Eszter thought about herself as an accomplished communication trainer, who had a lot of proven and effective activities that worked well before, who could connect to people, and whose trainings were evaluated highly by former participants. Here she started to doubt herself (maybe she is not that good a trainer after all, as she could not create an atmosphere of trust even among 6 people and the group rejected her activities). All of this created a professional identity threat for her.

Impression management is not that important: For Eszter’s generation impression management was not the most important thing in group settings. For Eszter, too much focus on impression management seems shallow.

Younger generations have different values: Esther thought that she might become too old for the younger generations, she can no longer identify with the values of people in their late teens and early twenties. Based on her observations (both during trainings and at home, by observing her teenage daughter), she drew the conclusions that younger generations value impression management above everything else. What matters the most is what image they create about themselves in others. They also seem to value respect towards others less than her.

In a training every task should be voluntary: Eszter wanted to develop the communication skills of the participants by asking them to practice public speaking and then be open to feedbacks (and give feedbacks to others) but the group rejected this proposal. As she did not expect this, she felt confused, powerless. She could do little as she did not believe that it makes any sense to force participants to carry out activities.

FRAMES OF REFERENCES OF THE PERSON AT THE ORIGIN OF THE INCIDENT “Magdi”

During a reflection on the previous activities a participant declares: "These activities were shit. Move on!"

A communication training should teach negotiation skills: To develop negotiation skills impression management is more important than honesty (and honesty could even be detrimental). A communication training should teach participants how to position themselves better and not how to connect to their inner feelings, thoughts. It should be about techniques that are useful in “hard” negotiations.

Useful activities to develop communication skills: those activities that teach how to be assertive in difficult situations, that are close to real life, and that can be carried out quickly, that are fast paced.

Positions are scarce in the film/theatrical producer field: Only a few can make it in the film/theatrical producer field, and people compete with each other for these few spots.

The need to seem confident, strong: The key to success is to seem confident and strong, otherwise people will not respect you, will walk over you. This is a hostile environment, if someone shows his/her deficiencies other might take advantage of this. Magdi might have thought that despite the fact that she explained her trainer why they don't want to open up, the trainer started to highlight the importance of vulnerability again at the next meeting, as if she did not understand Magdalena's message.

The training institution's goal is to serve the trainees: participants of this training chose this institution so that they become well-prepared, well-connected, successful film/theatrical producers. The institution should fulfill this goal, should not impose activities/trainings on them that are not directly linked to this purpose.

The need for privacy: People have the right to not discuss their inner struggles, their vulnerability with strangers, even in a training. They should be able to decide what they want to share and what they want to keep to themselves.

Rejection of the authority of the trainer: the trainer is not seen as an authority figure, does not have a higher status because of her position, she does not deserve special respect for this.

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