

Sharing the Universe: Outreach Training Videos

Role Playing Exercise for



Produced by the
Astronomical Society of the Pacific
<http://www.astrosociety.org>

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Facilitating a Role-Playing Exercise

Topic: Difficult Questions and Difficult People

Role-playing exercises can be an excellent way for you and your club members to share effective ways to interact with the public in difficult situations. It can also be a way for your members to discover first-hand the rationale behind some of the difficult questions people ask.

Preparation:

Before the exercise you will need to develop a list of scenarios. Plan to allow 20 minutes for each scenario - 5 minutes for the role-playing and 15 minutes for a discussion. The scenarios should start off easy and gradually become more difficult. Make sure your scenarios are clear and have focused objectives. Important tip: the more time you spend planning the scenarios the smoother the exercise will go.

How to lead the Exercise:

1. Break the group into smaller groups of four
2. Explain the roles of the three characters – the amateur practices skills they would use, the public member should try to be as realistic as they can, the observers should watch the interaction to provide insight at the end of the exercise about what things were handled well and how things could have been handled better.
3. The facilitator should remind the group of the main points of the video:
 - a. Seize control!
 - b. Be pleasant
 - c. Respond neutrally
 - d. Get back on topic
4. Instruct the groups to spend a total of 5 minutes on each scenario (3-4 minutes role playing, and 1-2 minutes for the observer to make positive comments). The facilitator should give the signal to move on to the next scenario at the end of each set of five minutes. The facilitator should also make sure that for each scenario the players switch roles. This allows each of the four members of the group to experience all sides of the situation as well as observe how their fellow club mates handle similar situations.
5. After each scenario the facilitator should gather the groups back together and have a follow-up discussion using the questions below. This discussion is a time for the observers to talk about what they saw that worked and what didn't work as well as get feedback from the other groups about different ways to handle the situation. The facilitator should stress that comments be positive in nature.
 - Joe/Jane Public: What struck you as the motives behind your questions? Were any of these motives surprising?
 - Observers: Were there any solutions that stood out to you as particularly effective?
 - Amateurs: Were there any scenarios that you found particularly difficult?
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 until all the scenarios are finished.

A Sample Role Playing Session

Here are four sample scenarios for role-playing surrounding the topic of difficult questions. Please remember these are just possible scenarios. As the facilitator you should create scenarios that will be the most useful to your club.

You should allow about 20 minutes for each scenario – 5 minutes to act it out and 15 minutes for a group discussion.

1. The Mars Hoax

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 1 public member, 2 observers

Once Joe Public gets to the front of a long line he asks the amateur “I got an email yesterday that Mars is going to be as big as the moon. Is this true?” How does the amateur respond while still allowing the line to move along?

2. The Alien Believer

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 1 public member, 2 observers

An amateur is showing the star Vega to a large group of people. Joe Public says “Vega, isn’t that where aliens come from? I know that aliens have visited earth.” How does the amateur get the conversation back on track?

3. The Destruction Question

Number of players: 4, 1 amateur, 2 public members, 1 observer

An amateur is showing a group the Milky Way Galaxy. Joe Public says, “I hear there is a black hole in the center of our galaxy and we are going to get sucked into it!” Jane Public interrupts and says, “who cares if that happens because as our sun gets older it is going to expand past our orbit and burn the earth up!” How does the amateur avoid widespread panic and get the focus back onto the Milky Way?

4. The Apollo Controversy

Number of players: 4, 2 amateurs, 1 public member, 1 observers

An amateur is showing a group Mare Tranquillitatis, the site that Apollo 11 landed. Suddenly Joe Public says, “Humans have never landed on the moon that was all fake”. Jane Amateur, standing at the next telescope, says, “I disagree! Have you seen the pictures of the landing? There is no way that could have been faked!” Joe and Jane then get into a heated argument over the topic. How does the amateur diffuse the situation and get the public focused back on the original activity?