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MILITARY BILLETING FRONT DESK CLERK
TRAINING PROGRAM IN
HUMAN RELATIONS

A Monograph

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of

Master of Professional Studies



by

Shirley Wallace Patterson

August, 1986

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VITA

The author was born on March 26, 1952 in Vicksburg, Mississippi. She is the ninth child of twelve children born to Annie Watson Wallace and Thomas W. Wallace. After graduating from Coleman High School in 1970, one year later she was employed with Nicholson-Cooper Steel where she worked four years prior to entering Mississippi Valley State University, Itta Bena, Mississippi. She continued her employment with them until receiving her Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology in 1978, as well as, receiving her commission into the United States Air Force through Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC).

Currently she is a Captain in the Air Force, serving in the Services career field (Hotel & Restaurant Management). She has traveled extensively during her eight years of service.

In 1983, she was selected to attend an Air Force sponsored graduate program in a civilian institute. In September, 1984, she entered the School of Hotel Administration at Cornell University. In August of 1986, the author completed her Master of Professional Studies Degree in Hotel Administration.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Title Page	i
Vita	ii
Table of Contents	iii
SECTION I: INTRODUCTION	1
STATEMENT OF PROBLEM and NEED ANALYSIS	3
SECTION II: FACILITATOR'S BRIEFING	10
PREPARING THE PHYSICAL SETTING	14
SECTION III: CASE MATERIAL	16
CONCLUSION	35
ENDNOTES	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	37

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

This monograph will provide a complete formal training package for military front desk personnel. Presently, there are no formal training programs specifically designed for junior enlisted personnel assigned to Air Force billeting operations. This training program will focus specifically on guest relations.

The initial steps in developing this training package required the use of ~~Department of Defense~~ ^{DoD} and Air Force regulations, due to the fact that various billeting functions are mandated by Congress. In addition to published requirements, new ideals and methods were incorporated through the use of structured role play. According to, Shaw, Corsini, Blake, and Mouton, "role playing is reality practice and action learning; it involves realistic behavior under unrealistic conditions." It also provides a simulated reality experience in which one can practice complex skills without hurting oneself or anyone else through failure. This fact alone makes role play a valuable learning tool in military operations.

This program is designed specifically for the use in the classroom, as the initial training for inexperienced front desk personnel. It is also designed to allow individual base services trainers to proceed with the program without any prior training.

This training program arose out of the need to provide a formal guest relations training manual.

Course Objective: At the conclusion of the training, trainees will be able to satisfy special requests as related to military life, and respond appropriately to guest complaints according to property policies and guest relations practices.

Target audience: Military Front Desk Clerks in the grades of E-0 thru E-4.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND NEED ANALYSIS

PROBLEM: This problem stems from the following: (1) front desk positions are usually first military jobs for junior enlisted personnel; (2) individuals are required under most conditions to wear military uniforms which display their rank; and (3) a technical training school for individuals in the Services Specialist career field presently does not exist. These elements present guest relations problems due to the highly structured, rank conscious military environment, and the inexperience of the new recruits.

The military front desk personnel are subjected to immediate intimidation because they are inexperienced, and are usually of lower rank than the guest they serve. Therefore, when confronted with guest complaints far too often the front desk personnel react out of fear, which can create an unpleasant situation. The results of this type of confrontation may be detrimental to an airmen's career, which make it imperative to provide formal classroom training rather than on-the-job training (OJT) in guest relations.

Presently, each Services Specialist prior to arriving at their

permanent duty station must undergo basic training, which consists of physical body conditioning, roles of leadership and management, and an introduction to the Chain of Command (hierarchy). Training in their job specialties is accomplished through OJT. This training consists of learning skills in computerized front office operations, but does not include training in human relations.

"People are "driven" to express their unique personalities, to gain approval, to achieve status, to experience sentiment or emotion, to acquire wealth, to give and receive affection, to enhance their egos, to "actualize" their potentialities, to avoid insecurity, and to satisfy other basic motives—all of which are interrelated in complex ways. These motives help define what we might call a person's self-interest. However, the formal work organization is not, ordinarily designed with the members' self-interest in mind."² This holds true for the military organization as well. Jobs and/or career fields are specifically designed with the military mission as the primary concern. However, due to the development of the all-volunteer forces some emphasis has been shifted to the career goals of the individual. Yet, there still remains a need to socialize the individual to the military organization in order to

achieve useful human relations training.

Effective socialization can alter undesirable behaviors in dealing with guest relations. The act of socialization is a major step in the development of human resources. "Broadly defined, the concept of socialization as related to organizations refers to the process by which new members learn the value system, the norms and the required behavior patterns of the society, organization or group which they are entering."³

Socialization into the military organization requires a thorough understanding of the organizational hierarchy, and the behavior patterns of the individuals occupying various positions within the Chain of Command. Hierarchy is a basic organizational characteristic, but it has the most profound psychological implication for the individual members. In the hierarchy, persons work together but are rewarded and motivated differently. Persons of higher levels are not only paid more; they are awarded greater psychological compensation. These facts contribute greatly to the mental stability or personal attitude of the lower ranking personnel. Generally, military front desk personnel are at the lowest level of the organization, for which studies show that these individuals

very often feel deprived in their self-esteem.

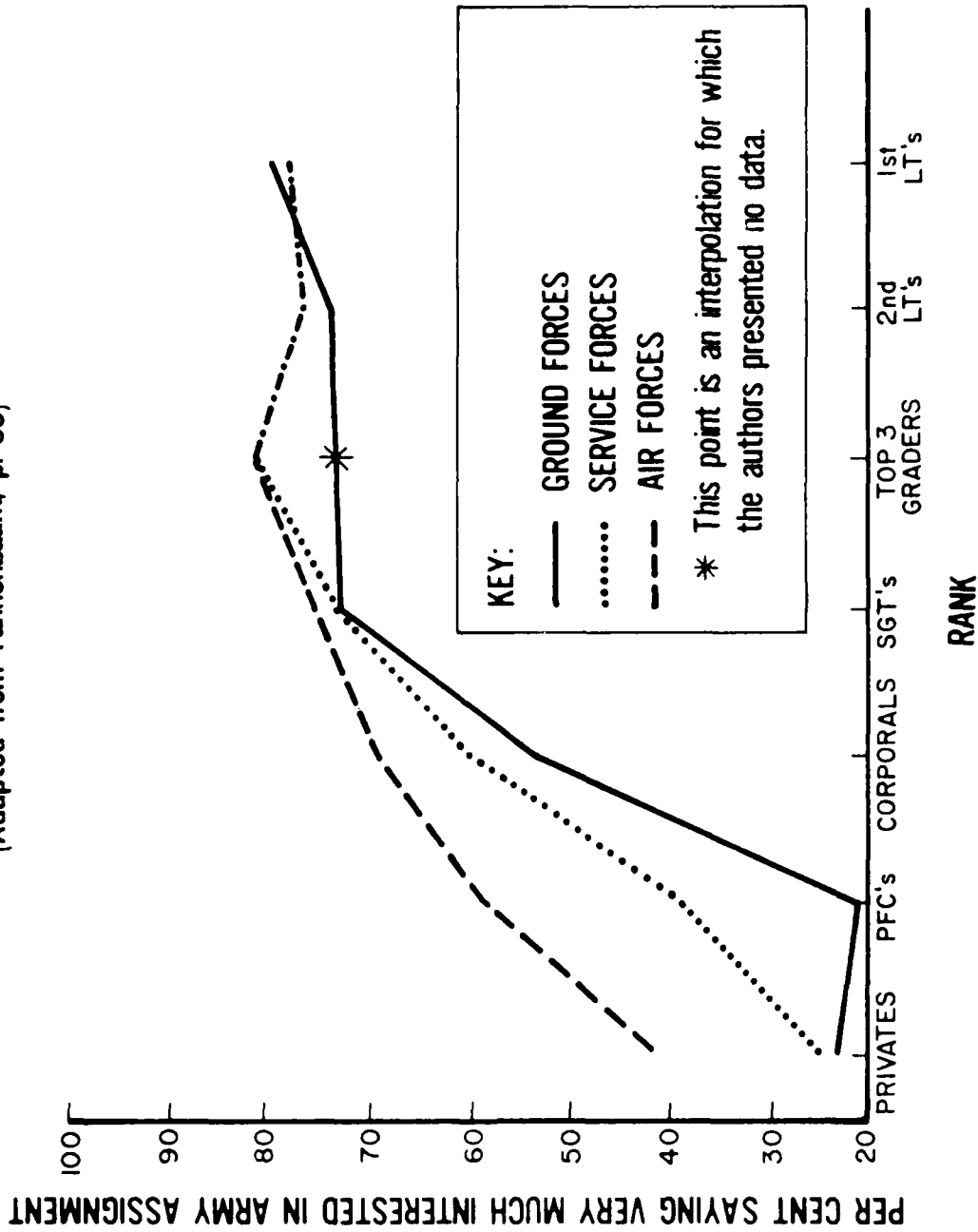
A study conducted during World War II by a group of psychologists, sociologists, and statisticians using the United States Army shows that persons at higher ranks are generally more interested in or satisfied with their jobs than are persons at lower levels. They are also more involved and personally identified with their work, and their attitudes toward organization itself are more favorable. These results are depicted in Figure 1.⁴

Arnold Tannenbaum in his work on social psychology suggest that "persons at the bottom of the hierarchy live in a psychologically depressed area, and each of them has considerable support from his fellow workers for his relatively jaundiced view of organizational life."⁵ The key to effective socialization is to reform the point-of-view of these individuals, which will result in increase self-esteem, and his/her attitudes about the organization.

How can we accomplish this reformation? Role play is the most effective means of modifying behaviors and attitudes. Role play is "learning by doing!" Of course, some human relations skills can be learned by reading books, listening to lectures or watching films.

FIGURE 1. Interest in army job among officers and enlisted men

(Adapted from Tannenbaum, p. 38)



However, role playing is a much more effective manner of learning complex skills because it repeats and reinforces the accomplishment of those skills. Role playing allows the individual to think, feel, and act at the same time; one is able to experience all sides of the situation, which creates a superb learning experience. Too often in life we know what to do but cannot do it, either because of fear or other emotional hindrances or because we just do not have the skills. There is no difference in essence between learning to fly an airplane and learning to handle a guest dispute; both may be learned by watching others through lectures and books, but it is only through experience that one can really learn to do the task adequately. Through role play one may practice different behaviors without the fear of the repercussions of failure.

In the military hierarchy power and authority may be a critical source of difficulty when handling guest complaints. The general problem has two aspects. First, some persons who possess power and authority exercise it ineffectively; others who know they are subject to power and authority have trouble accepting that fact, regardless of whether power and authority is presently being exercised upon them and in whatever manner. Second, how people react to power and authority can

be a factor in increasing or decreasing their effectiveness and personal satisfaction. When attitudes toward authority in general or toward a specific person in authority arouse antagonism or the sense of being threatened, the person who has these feelings becomes less competent to deal objectively with the situation. Thinking may become distorted and self-defeating cycles of behavior may result. Major sources agree that the most appropriate intervention to help people deal with these difficulties is role playing.

SECTION II

FACILITATOR'S BRIEFING

I. The Benefits of Role Playing in Human Relations Training

According to Shaw, Corsini, Blake and Mouton, there are four distinctive characteristics of the use of role playing as an approach to human relations problems you must consider.⁶

(1) **Emphasis on Personal Concerns or Problems:** Role playing is tailored to the particular needs of the participant. Impersonal training procedures such as the use of textbooks and or isolated lectures, usually are too abstract, too general, or too focused on problems of the typical or hypothetical person to meet the needs for training, instruction, and evaluation in concrete situations.

(2) **Emphasis on Personal Behavior:** An effective learning situation engages a person in actual behavior. How does the person act when confronted with problems that are meaningful and personally significant to him? How could he act differently? If the subject matter being studied is an individual's own behavior, he must accept the learning situation as relevant to his needs. Thus, he is motivated to study, to

inquire, and to experiment. He can relate insights obtained to his actual way of behaving in specific situations.

(3) Active Participation: Because people act toward one another globally, role playing is able to break through verbal barriers and generate insight and skill where other methods fail.

In role playing, the artificial separation between thoughts and words on the one hand and action on the other is avoided. The participant has an opportunity to "do," to act in the situation on his own terms. In the traditional classroom situation the student may learn the "right" answers, but gains little or no understanding of them or capacity to apply them. Learning is too likely to be by memory and does not become internalized. Active participation that involves a person in testing his own understanding of a problem and trying new ways of solving it helps to make the learning practical and useful. Role playing provides the individual with the opportunity to participate actively in the subject matter being studied through analyzing, exploring, experimenting, and actually trying out new solutions.

(4) Feedback and Practice: The use of feedback is essential for instruction based on participation. Other people, often members of the

training group, tell an individual how his or her behavior appears to them, or the individual discovers how others were affected by the behavior. Feedback, a basic approach to studying human problems, helps an individual to identify his or her blind spots and to receive the kind of information that one ordinarily fails to see or hear. By checking personal perceptions against those of others. Alternative ways of behaving that are explored under feedback conditions can be evaluated on the spot. By testing various reactions, one can learn to become more comfortable when acting in new ways. However, a person must feel free to expose personal reactions to examination and evaluation by others. Not only do the individuals learn sensitivity and social skills through role playing, they also learn a novel and constructive way to approach the analysis and solution of any human problem.

II. Preparing The People

Participants should be made aware of:

(1) that role playing often is an "opening up" process. It often involves ventilation of feelings, tensions, and previously unexpressed thoughts and ideas. Many role play techniques are designed to make it possible for people to "let go" and speak their thoughts; at times this may be risky.

On the other hand, it is this very process that makes role playing so impactful and revelent to the real feelings of the people participating.

(2) that final judgment or decisions should not be based on one or two interactions; rather, the group should continue to grow and explore as it moves more deeply into the content and objectives of the session.

III. General Guidelines

The use of the developed scenarios is not required. In most instances it is highly desirable to incorporate spontaneous situations based on the participants' suggested problems and key issues.

Problem situations may be dealt with out of context; some issues may be magnified for study and experimentation, and there may be some distortion when spontaneous scenarios develop. It is advisable for participants to keep the interpersonal and personal actions of their colleagues confidential in order to avoid misjudgment.

PREPARING THE PHYSICAL SETTING

Much of the success of role playing depends on the physical location and surroundings in which it takes place.⁷

Location

The ideal location has three characteristics:

Proper Size. The room should have a minimum of twenty-five to a maximum of fifty square feet per participant. Very small or very large rooms are not suitable. If one has to make a choice between two unsuitable locations, a smaller room is generally preferred.

Privacy. The role-play location should have no distractions. No outside person should enter the room or be able to look into it or be able to overhear what is going on. Participants should not be interrupted by telephone calls or visitors. The room should be quiet, and extraneous noises, such as outside voices, should be avoided.

Flexibility. The room should not have fixed furniture. A classroom or an auditorium with fixed seats is an example of a poor location.

It frequently is difficult to obtain a proper location; the ingenious facilitator will requisition a suitable executive office if no better location is available.

Scheduling

It is a challenge to arrange a schedule that is not irksome to at least some of the participants. Furthermore, a schedule that is convenient for the individuals may be inconvenient for the organization. Compromises may well have to be made; but unless the time selected can contribute to

effective learning, the facilitator should confront the issues that are blocking appropriate arrangements.

Arrangements

The general rule for placement of furniture is that there should be no pieces in the room beyond those needed and that items should be arranged to permit maximum visual and verbal communication between all members. A long conference room with a narrow table is an example of a particularly poor arrangement.

Extra pieces of furniture should be removed from the room if possible. If not, they should be grouped in a corner out of the way and, if possible, separated from the rest of the room by screens. Chairs and tables to be used should be neatly arranged so that individuals can go to their proper places without difficulty.

SECTION III

CASE MATERIAL^{8/9}**CASE 1: THE GIFT OF HAPPINESS: EXPERIENCING POSITIVE FEEDBACK**

Goals: To promote a climate of trust, self-worth, and positive reinforcement within a small group. To experience giving and receiving positive feedback in a non-threatening way. This case should be used initially for putting the students in the appropriate frame of mind for role-playing and feedback.

Group Size: Three to ten participants who have had some experience together as a group.

Time Required: Approximately five minutes per participant and about thirty minutes for processing.

Materials Utilized: Pencils and paper.

Physical Setting: Tables or desk chairs (if not available, use lapboards or other solid writing surfaces). Participants should be located around the room so that a sense of privacy is preserved while writing.

Process:

I. The facilitator distributes pencils and paper. Each participant receives enough paper to write a message to each other member of the group.

II. The facilitator makes a statement such as the following: "It is often possible to enjoy a small gift more than a large one. Yet, we sometimes become so concerned about not being able to do great things for each other that we neglect to do the little things that can be very meaningful. In the following experience we will all be giving a small gift of happiness to each person in this group."

III. The facilitator then invites each participants to write on a slip of paper a message to each other member of the group. The message is intended to make that person feel positive about himself or herself.

IV. The facilitator recommends several possible approaches to giving positive feedback so that participants can find appropriate means of

expression even for individuals whom they do not know well or do not feel close to. The facilitator may tell the participants to:

1. Try to be specific: say, "I like the way you smile at everyone when you arrive," rather than, "I like your attitude."
2. Write a special message to fit each person rather than a comment that could apply to several persons.
3. Include every participant, even if you are not too well acquainted with them. Choose whatever it is about the person that you respond to most positively.
4. Try telling each person what you have observed as his/her real strength or notable success in the group, why you would like to know him better, or why you are glad to be in the group with him.
5. Make your message personal: use the other person's name, state your message in the first person, and use such terms as "I like," or "I feel."
6. Tell each person what it is about him that makes you a little happier. (The facilitator may wish to distribute or post such guidelines.)

V. Participants are encouraged to sign their messages, but they are given the option of leaving them unsigned.

VI. After each message is finished, the facilitator asks the participants to fold it once and place the name of the recipient on the outside. He/she asks them to distribute their messages to a place designated by each participant as his "mailbox."

VII. When all messages have been delivered, the facilitator invites participants to share the feedback that was most meaningful to them, to clarify any ambiguous messages, and to express the feelings they *have experienced during the process.*

Variations:

I. Participants may be permitted to send messages only to those persons toward whom they have significant positive feelings.

II. The content can be changed to negative feedback. One alternative is to have two phase, one positive and the other negative. The order of the phases can be reversed.

III. Participants can be focused on one at a time. The other members can write messages to an individual while he/she is predicting what

feedback he will receive.

IV. The process can be generalized to include almost any content.

Examples: "What I can't say to you is...," "You are the (superlative adjective) person in this group," "I want you to...," "I rank you___in closeness to me in this group because..."

V. Actual gifts may be exchanged as symbolic feedback. Participants can be instructed to bring to the session a personal gift that is significant to them. They may also be asked to leave the meeting to find symbolic gifts, such as flowers, stones, leaves, books, pictures, etc.

CASE 2: HANDLING DISAGREEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Goal (*stated to the group*): To increase the ability of desk clerks to listen effectively when confronted with disagreement or resistance.

Specific Behavioral Objective (*for the facilitator*): Participants will increase their skill in using questions, general statements, paraphrasing, and other nondirective or active-listening responses, specifically when confronted with feelings or ideas with which they may disagree.

Instructions (*for the facilitator*)

1. After a brief discussion of the purpose of the session, each participant is given a brief role and background information sheet. The group is then divided into teams of three members each.
2. One member of each subgroup is designated as member A, another as member B, and the third as the observer. Each member is given a sheet of instructions pertinent to his or her role.

Role Instruction (Member A)

Your role during the first phase of this activity is to listen and ask questions without pursuing your own opinion or attempting to force the other person into a conclusion that agrees with your own. You may, from time to time, state ideas; however, you are not to attempt to change the other person's point of view. Your goal is to listen and understand. The following information is provided to guide you in this effort.

Appropriate Listening Responses:

1. General questions (What do you think? What happened?) are useful in finding out more about what another person thinks. Loaded questions or questions that lead to a predetermined answer (Don't you think you should be more reasonable?) are inappropriate.
2. Statements that encourage the person to talk (Tell me more about it: I'm interested in some of your other feelings) tend to increase communication.
3. Paraphrasing or nondirective responses (sometimes called active-listening responses) that pick up what the other person has said and feed it back may be useful. For example, if a person says, "I think enlisted personnel are becoming too impertinent and belligerent in their relationships with officers," The interviewer might say, "I see, you think that enlisted personnel are disrespectful to officers." This kind of response encourages the other person to talk.

Your partner (role player B) will initiate the discussion.

Role Instructions (Member B)

During the role-play situation you are to express your opinions freely. If you encounter resistance or disagreement you may deal with it any way you see fit. You are asked not to play a part but express your genuine feelings about the issue and pursue your point of view in order to clarify the issue, influence the other person's opinion, or simply get your own position stated. You are to initiate the discussion by introducing your point of view about this statement: *Enlisted personnel are treated unfairly in most organizations. Officers dominate the scene and often are unaware of their high-and-mighty behavior.*

Observer Guide

During the course of the role-play discussion, observe Member A. Did he or she (check statement that apply):

Quickly reveal his or her own point of view and push for a favorite point?

Ask questions that suggest a desired answer (leading questions)?

Seem interested in drawing out and understanding the viewpoint of the other?

Occasionally paraphrase what the other person said or use other nondirective techniques to draw out additional information?

Comment on ways in which the interviewer kept the discussion going:

Summary (for the facilitator)

Conduct a brief discussion of the role-play activity, drawing out observer(s) and participant(s) in order to clarify the nature of the listening process and ways in which diverse viewpoints can be pursued. Discussion items include:

1. Which responses by the member A seemed to encourage the interviewee to talk more?
2. What comments seemed to discourage the interviewee or put him or her on the defensive?
3. Were the observers or member B quickly able to discern the interviewer's motives and goals or did the interviewer maintain an open listening posture?
4. Construct a list of the kinds of comments, approaches, and attitudes that seem to improve the quality of listening.

CASE 3: DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Goal: To increase the desk clerks ability in effectively handling guest complaints.

Specific Behavioral Objective *(for the facilitator)*: Participants will increase their skill in seeking information without judgment and hostility when confronted with a disgruntled customer.

Instructions *(for the facilitator)*

1. The activity is to be conducted by teams of three. If necessary, teams of four can be used with two people acting as observers.
2. Distribute role descriptions and an observer guide to each group member. Tell the member that they will practice the specific steps and skills involved in dealing with a complaint or with resistance from a customer.
3. Post the four-step model below so that it can be seen by all. Announce that the model is to be followed by the person handling the complaint.

The Model

1. Clarify the complaint. Seek information without hostility, argument, or evaluation.
2. Be sure that you understand the complaint. Restate it. Show that you understand it.
3. State your position (the organizational policy) on the issue.
4. Recommend a course of action.

Role for Airman Joe Lee, Billeting Clerk , Far Left AFB, Arizona

You are Airman Joe Lee, a one stripper fresh out of basic training. You have been assigned as a front desk billeting clerk at Far Left AFB, Arizona. The organization provides billets for most of the elite flying forces in the United States and various European countries. Your supervisor, the Noncommissioned Officer In Charge of Billeting, is Technical Sergeant Thomas Yes. Since the notification of your future job, your enthusiasm has been high and you have studied AFR 90-9 front to back. Therefore, you have acquired some knowledge of the reservation and assignment policies for the transient quarters. Your concern is that you have no previous experience or formal training in billeting front desk operations (specifically customer service), except for two weeks of on-the-job training, since being assigned to Far Left AFB. You are not sure of what approach you should take when dealing with guest complaints, particularly those from officers and senior noncommissioned officers.

You are about to be approached by the aircraft commander (Captain) who has several objections to their billeting arrangements. The Captain evidently does not like the idea that each member of his crew has been split up. He is demanding that each member of his crew be billeted in the same

facility on base or be assigned contract quarters or given certificates of nonavailability. You are well aware that your Bible (AFR 90-9) specifically states that crew integrity is not required, but desired if facilities are available. Since their crew had not made reservations, obtaining rooms together was impossible at the time of their arrival. Contract quarters and certificates of nonavailability are completely out of the question since on-base quarters are available.

Not only is the Captain insisting that they must have crew integrity, he is also saying that the rooms you have assigned them are inadequate. Well, you aren't buying that because just two days ago you witness one of your buddies being chewed out by Tsgt Yes for submitting to a guest's complaint that the rooms were inadequate. Your buddy had taken upon himself to reassign the guest to another room that had been booked for a special visitor. This action caused major problems with the Command section. Therefore, you have made up your mind that this is not going to happen to you. Furthermore, after touring the transient facilities you feel they are more than adequate, since they are much better than the dormitories where the unaccompanied enlisted members are forced live. You don't think it's quite fair that these high and mighty visitors come and get to stay in such

nice quarters when you and your peers must live in such cramped quarters.

The Captain is very persistent with his demands. You are the front desk clerk on duty and you have the responsibility to handle this complaint before it is forwarded to your supervisor.

Role for Captain Dale Somebody, Aircraft Commander

You are Dale Somebody. You are a very proud fighter pilot with over 1500 flying hours. You feel that your crew should be placed in nothing less than Distinguished Visitors' quarters because of their special achievements. They have flown many missions, some hosting the President and his cabinet members, along with other foreign diplomats. You have in your presence your unit's regulation which states that crew integrity is a must when flying your missions. It also says that if crew integrity cannot be accommodated at an installation then contract quarters must be made available. You personally feel that the rooms that are available at Far Left AFB are inadequate for your crew because they have black & white TVs instead of color TVs; and secondly they have shared latrines. You don't like these arrangements and are resistant to them. You want to see the desk clerk who had the audacity to assign you and your crew to such lousy rooms. You plan to get what you feel are adequate accommodations.

Observer Guide

Attached you will find an outline of the step-by-step model that was presented earlier. You will now be observing two people—one a desk clerk in billeting and the other a Captain who is an aircraft commander, discussing a complaint that the Captain has about their billeting arrangements. You are to pay particular attention to the procedural model that was described earlier and to give feedback to the desk clerk regarding his or her method of handling the complaint.

The model is shown on the next page. In Column 2 identify what was said regarding each of the key steps in the model; i.e., did the desk clerk seek clarification and, if so, how? In Column 3 indicate the suggestions or alternative courses of action that you feel would be desirable.

The Model: Observer Guide

Procedures

What Was Said

**Suggestions and
Alternatives**

1. Clarify the complaint
(Seek information, avoid
hostility)

2. Show that you understand
(Restate the complaint)

3. State your position
(Policy)

4. Recommend a course
of action

Typical Comments From Participants *(For the Facilitator)*

1. This person is not really me! Allow role-play of a real situation.
2. Do we really have these kinds of problems?
3. This scenario makes me feel uncomfortable! This would never happen in a real situation.
4. This is find for the classroom, but it will never work for me.
5. This is great, now when do I get to try out my new found behavior?
6. My supervisor insist on handling all guest complaints, but now I can see if he/she is doing it right.
7. Role playing is fun, it allows me act and feel in ways I am afraid of when on duty.
8. The customer is always right, so why bother learning effective listening?

CONCLUSION

Through the use of role-play techniques, billeting front desk clerks will be allowed to examine their own behavior based on new stimuli. These stimuli are provided by the interaction of the observers and the facilitator. The "hands-on" participation and feedback usually provides reinforcement of positive behavior.

This training package consist of structured role-play situations. However, to further enhance the training experience, each base training manager must allow for spontaneous situations. Participants should be allowed to address specific problems they may have encountered or heard of during their assignment.

Combining the structured and unstructured or developmental role-play techniques will provide an organized learning situation while at the same time providing opportunities for experimentation and spontaneous interaction.

ENDNOTES

¹Malcolm Shaw, Raymond Corsini, Jane Mouton, "Role Playing: A Practical Manual for Group Facilitators," (San Diego, California, 1980) p. 1.

²Arnold Tannenbaum, "Social Psychology Of The Work Organization," (Belmont, California, 1967) p. 32.

³Patricia Sanders and John Yanouzas, "Socialization to Learning" Training and Development Journal, July 1983, p. 14.

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⁵Ibid, p. 46.

⁶Malcolm Shaw, Raymond Corsini, Jane Mouton, "Role Playing: A Practical Manual for Group Facilitators," (San Diego, California, 1980) p. 20.

⁷Ibid, p. 43.

⁸Ibid, p. 41 and p. 126

⁹J. William Pfeiffer and John Jones, "A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training," (La Jolla, California, 1973) p. 15.

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10 - 86