

A Context for Role Training

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My generic two page paper on Role Training focuses on the work situation as an example. Here I show the application to the client's court behavior. The goal is the same, to get the defendant what he wants. We relied on one's experience of disappointing attempts in the work situation to provide our baseline. The same may apply to the court presentation, but every now and then the defendant has no previous experience and we take into that account also.

Role training involves interaction with 'target participants' who may or may not be like the people he knows. As for the one's he knows, parent figures and siblings are prominent. Well established habits are likely to carry over. The defendant who has been involved with psychodrama is more likely to be conscious of the pitfalls here. He may put on them attitudes and defend against them when very likely they are much less like family figures and more like the ordinary people he meets every day, who do not challenge his interests.

At least that's how they begin, but they must give the defendant very close scrutiny, to determine whether his tale holds water, and whether it is more believable than the prosecution version, derived from the picture the police take for granted. His task, however, is not to fight them but help them see that his story may well be true, and the prosecution's a sad mistake. He has nothing to gain by blaming them, society, or his peers. Sooner or later everyone is held accountable for his actions. If the defendant welcomes them to put themselves in his place, he'll gain their sympathy and desire to see the prosecution 'lose.'

In preparing the defendant for his court appearance, after we've established a good working relationship with him, we can get a glimpse of the task before us through the use of "chair back." We set the scene in terms of how the defendant imagines the various players will be. Before we get into interactions with the auxiliary representatives of the players, we set up a scene whereby the defendant imagines he's on the witness stand. His first task is to tell the court his story. Then he moves to the chair behind his chair, and tells us 'privately' what he doesn't want the court to know. Once that is established, we reverse him back to the front chair, to be more open with his feelings, and trust the others to give him an even break. Then he lets come forth some of the things he held back when he first faced them. He speaks the hidden out loud, while we reassure him that none of what he says will go beyond this room without his permission. Then he passes through several players' chairs with a few lines for which each player is thinking and feeling now. He doesn't respond in any other way than to tell us how he feels about this person and that person now.

This serves to make the protagonist aware of the variety of attitudes he can expect to encounter. Now we are ready to follow the procedure recommended in our generic paper on role training. Now we may be ready to say he has the raw material for honing how he presents himself toward getting the verdict he wants. During the voir dire the jury who are coming forth with their own feelings may flash a glance at him. If his face shows he feels for them too, that helps. The defendant need not deny his limitations, or even question misinformation or misinterpretations. He must focus on the facts relevant to the offense for which he is being charged, and not waste his attention on peripheral matters. He may even be self-indulgent where it doesn't relate to the charges against him. They will believe this, like him more, and even give him the benefit of the doubt where it matters most.

The one who has been in prison listens to those who've followed their own advice and failed to convince the jury. We can brainstorm why they were not acquitted, without naming names. Will he follow their worthless advice and end up serving time like they're doing? The lawyer has a far better grasp of what will be believed and what will not in these other cases. His judgment may commend itself to the accused, making them more receptive to their lawyer's advice. The lawyer wants the court to see how the accused is no threat to society, and if the court comes to believe that, the accused is going to get a better break.

It is the picture presented against this background which will give the court the 'excuse' to consider a 'reasonable doubt, and the judge to rule as favorably as he can, whatever the verdict, which might well be to a lesser charge, with an offer of probation, or a suspended sentence...