

Third Side Responding Exercise¹



Teaching Note

Materials Needed:

- Overhead projector or LCD set up
- Magic markers, flip charts, flip chart stand

Purpose of the Exercise:

- The purpose of this exercise is to give people an opportunity to practice responding as a Third Sider.
- It is also to show them that there are multiple ways to respond to a situation – based on the Third Side Roles – and they should consider which they might do best. Often it is assumed you have to intervene directly yourself but there are many other ways to get involved.
- Finally, this exercise is designed to give people confidence to take some action when they see a situation evolving in front of them. What that action is varies tremendously.

Exercise Time required:

- The instructor will require 10 minutes to introduce the exercise.
- The participants should be given 15 minutes to conduct this exercise
- The instructor will need 20 minutes to debrief it.

Total time: 45 minutes

Detailed instructions for running the exercise:

- Divide the room into triads. Ask the triads to select the person that will act as a Third Sider. That person should then be asked to leave the room for a few moments.
- When all the Third Siders have left the room explain to the two remaining people that they are to role play the following (tell them they should determine who will be who after the instructions):
 - Both of the participants are riding on a subway car. It is approximately half full. They do not know each other.

¹ There does not appear to be an ideal number to do this exercise with. It is preferable if there are at least 10 people, but that is not necessary.

- One participant (the asker) approaches the other (the responder) asking for money and telling a story about how hard things have been for them lately. How they lost their job and their spouse left them.
- The other participant dismisses the person asking for money in a mildly insincere manner. The participant asking for money persists and things get more heated until the asker shoves the other participant.
- They are on the verge of a serious escalation – enter the Third Sider -- what action can they take in this situation?

Invite the Third Sider back into the room.

- Explain the scenario again to all involved in this manner:
 - The Third Sider should sit in their chair about 7-10 feet away from the two role players, who should both be standing. Instruct the Third Sider to take some action as they see fit. (Note: Do not tell them what to do – let them do what is natural even if that is nothing).
 - You are all on a subway car. It is approximately half full. None of you know each other.
 - Instruct the two role players to begin acting out the scenario.
 - After they have run the exercise ask them to jot down a few notes and to play it over again two more times.

General Debrief:

As a way to debrief this situation the instructor might start by telling the following true story:

“The afternoon train rattled through the suburbs of Tokyo. At one station the doors opened, and suddenly the quiet was shattered by a man bellowing violent, incomprehensible curses. This big, drunk and dirty man staggered into our car. Screaming, he swung at a woman holding a baby. The blow sent her spinning into the laps of an elderly couple. Terrified, the couple jumped up and scrambled toward the other end of the car as the laborer kicked toward their backs.”

So remembers Terry Dobson, an American student who had spent the previous three years studying Aikido, a Japanese art of self-defense.

“This is it!” Dobson thought as he got to his feet. “People are in danger. If I don’t do something fast, somebody will probably get hurt.”

Seeing Dobson, the drunk recognized a chance to focus his rage. “Aha!” he roared. “A foreigner! You need a lesson in Japanese manners!”

“I gave him a slow look of disgust and dismissal,” Dobson recounts. “I planned to take this turkey apart, but he had to make the first move. I wanted him mad, so I pursed my lips and blew him a kiss.”

“All right!” he hollered. “You’re gonna get a lesson.” He gathered himself for a rush at me.

A fraction of a second before he could move, someone shouted, “Hey!” I remember the strangely joyous, lilting quality of it. “Hey!”

The drunk and I both stared down at a tiny Japanese old man, sitting immaculate in his kimono. He beamed delightedly at the laborer, as though he had a most welcome secret to share.

“C’mere and talk with me,” the old man said in an easy vernacular, beckoning to the drunk.

The big man followed, as if on a string. He planted his feet belligerently and roared, “Why the hell should I talk to you?”

The old man continued to beam at the laborer. “What’cha been drinkin’?” he asked, his eyes sparkling with interest.

“I been drinkin’ sake,” the laborer bellowed back, “and it’s none of your business!”

“Oh, that’s wonderful,” the old man said. “You see, I love sake too. Every night, me and my wife warm up a little bottle of sake and take it out into the garden, and we look to see how our persimmon tree is doing.” He continued talking about his persimmon tree, eyes twinkling.

As he struggled to follow the old man’s conversation, the drunk’s face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. “Yeah,” he said. “I love persimmons, too....” His voice trailed off.

“Yes,” said the old man, smiling, “and I’m sure you have a wonderful wife.”

“No,” replied the laborer. “My wife died.” The big man began to sob. “I don’t got no wife, I don’t got no home, I don’t got no job. I’m so ashamed of myself.” Tears rolled down his cheeks; a spasm of despair rippled through his body.

At that point the train arrived at Dobson’s stop. As the doors opened, he heard the old man cluck sympathetically. “My, my,” he said, “this is a difficult predicament, indeed. Sit down here and tell me about it.”

Dobson turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled on the seat, his head in the old man’s lap. The old man was softly stroking the filthy, matted hair.

“What I had wanted to do with muscle had been accomplished with kind words,” Dobson says. “It would be a long time before I could truly speak about the resolution of conflict.”

Questions:

The following questions may be used to elicit responses to this exercise:

- For the Third Siders, the first time we ran the scenario what were you thinking and feeling?
- What were the different types of responses that the Third Siders came up with to this exercise? Which roles were these responses most closely associated with?
- What do you see as your biggest impediment to getting involved in Third Side acts? Why do you feel that way?
- What might give you more confidence to get involved in some manner?