

Here is your first clue. You express an interest in Fred's girl, and learn they are night-clubbing and spending freely, instead of saving for their marriage. Then, on this particular day, Joe, the older worker, had brought down his new car to show his friends. This was what touched off Fred's resentment.

Now you try to lead Fred into realizing it is his girl's pressure to make more money that has made him unreasonable about Joe. Also you might add, "When you think about it, Fred, those older men didn't have anything when they started out, either. They've acquired those things over the years." For, although you can't save Fred's money for him, you can keep him from carrying a grudge that could hurt production and create friction.

The practice a superintendent gets in a case like this doesn't guarantee that things will go just that smoothly when actually dealing with a grumbling employee. It only means that the superintendent knows what to look for and is prepared to find it.

THIS IS but a glimpse of how role-playing is used to train a person to handle industrial problems more effectively. Let's see how it can be useful in helping someone with an emotional problem.

Tony, a young veteran, was a handsome man who had lived contentedly in the shelter of a large family. While he was in service, his mother died, his brothers and sisters married, and Tony returned to live with his father in a boardinghouse. Gradually, he lost interest in everything, couldn't sleep, was too tired to work, wouldn't answer when spoken to.

Finally, a psychiatrist suggested that role-playing be used. Tony went passively to join a group of six

persons, including a man of 30 who couldn't keep a job, a pretty social worker who couldn't keep a beau, and a businessman with troubles.

The director knew each one's background and that they had all been sent to her for the same reason—to be helped to overcome the resistance they had developed toward other people. By group therapy and by role-playing, she would try to teach them new attitudes, new ways to approach their difficulties.

She started by having them act out simple scenes in their homes, using others in the group to play necessary characters. At first, Tony took no part and would answer irrelevantly when asked to discuss a situation. The group began to eye him questioningly. Why the isolation? Was he snobbish, timid, or angry?

He was the last to act out a scene and did so with a minimum of action, as if it took tremendous effort. Afterwards, however, he was more animated, almost elated, he was so pleased by the group's interest. Now, bit by bit, he entered into group participation. At one session, the director asked him what he would like to do the following evening.

"Go bowling with my father," Tony replied.

"Show us," the director suggested.

Choosing the businessman to play his father, Tony enacted a surprising scene. As they went through the motions of bowling, Tony called out the scores.

Each time, he made a strike! His father's score was pathetic.

The group discussed this seriously, and concluded they had found one reason for Tony's inaction. He had such high standards that he had paralyzed himself into doing nothing, as if saying, "If it can't be done my way, I won't play."

IN THE months that followed, others in the group became aware they each had similar unrealistic attitudes that interfered with their happiness. The social worker, for instance, acted out situations which made her aware that her critical attitude had frightened away every beau. The businessman revealed he had treated his wife like someone he'd hired for the job and could fire anytime.

Here, again, is only a glimpse of how role-playing can help solve our difficulties. It can be effective only when it has the voluntary cooperation of the individual. One of its greatest assets, however, is that it is not limited by age or education. It is used with retarded children, kindergarten youngsters, adolescents, groups of mothers, and with an entire family.

Its second asset is that it makes new use of the learning-by-action technique, an effective method of teaching. You saw how Tony went into action in role-playing. Once such a person feels he is part of a group, he learns how to make a contribution to society again—instead of backing away from life.

For More Information

You can obtain information on the uses of role-playing from:

Boris Speross, Industrial Relations Center, Haskell Hall, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Rosemary Lippitt, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Robert Haas, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Calif.

American Society for Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama, 101 Park Ave., New York City, N. Y., or 6 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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