



*My View*

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## Politics of Caring

In the last few months I have participated in Volunteer Training Academies at TIP Affiliates across the country. It's a joy being with new TIP Trainees who are so enthusiastic about TIP, and who as a result of the intense training they experienced really "get it." Inevitably at each training academy, a new bright eyed trainee approaches me with a question I've received for years..."why isn't TIP everywhere?"

That's a question I've asked myself for years. The fact is that despite our best and ongoing efforts TIP and the strong support from public safety officials where we do operate, TIP is in a relatively few locations in the country. Why?

When we approach cities and counties to "sell" them on TIP there is usually strong initial interest expressed by local emergency response agencies...for awhile things look good for TIP! However, as time goes on the "politics of caring" takes over. Most communities we approach have "caring programs" already in place...social workers, chaplains, victim witness coordinators, and a few crisis intervention programs. It usually takes time for these entrenched "caring groups" to learn about TIP and to realize much to their chagrin that there may be "new helpers in town."

The fact is that those in the helping professions are human beings with the same needs, fears and egos as the rest of us. When TIP enters a local community offering trauma intervention services the existing helpers often fear for their income, their status and their "turf." It's then that the "politics of caring" takes over. These existing helpers convince the local police and fire departments that there is no need to make a change..."we have our bases covered." When we try to point out the huge gaps in the existing helping system ("you don't respond 24/7," for example) it's to no avail. When we try to appeal to these caring professionals' professed desire to help others ("there is enough tragedy in this city for all of us"), it falls on deaf ears.

The "politics of caring" even occurs within the geographic areas of thriving TIP affiliates. In most, if not all of our affiliates there are jurisdictions which don't participate in TIP. These jurisdictions are surrounded by TIP cities and by chiefs who rave about TIP. Why then don't they participate in TIP? It's because each local community has its own internal "politics of caring" i.e. entrenched helpers who are threatened by TIP. As you can imagine, this situation is a cause of great frustration for TIP Managers.

I realize that I am generalizing about the role of the "politics of caring" in our expansion efforts. Certainly there have been times that TIP has been embraced by entire

communities including their networks of organizations providing crisis services. However, our overall experience has been one of being shut out of communities by organizations that view TIP as a threat.

What are the implications of the “politics of caring” I've described for those of us trying to grow TIP nationally and within our own Affiliate territories? I think there are 4 major implications.

1. We must not take our inability to establish TIP in a given city, agency or hospital personally or as “failures.” We should not think that if we only had better materials or a better sales pitch we could have prevailed. The fact is that when the existing helping system does not want us in their city, agency or hospital we won't be able to establish ourselves there. If we take the “politics of caring” personally we will abandon our expansion efforts, and we will miss the opportunities that are available.
2. We should not spend an inordinate amount of time and energy trying to convince cities / hospitals / agencies who don't want us... to want us. Most of our energy and focus should be on working with those who want to work with us.
3. There is Good News! The “politics of caring” involves people, and people come and go. If we are patient (often REALLY patient) opportunities for growth will emerge. I've seen it over and over again. Resistant cities become enthusiastic TIP partner cities because the players have changed
4. Let's appreciate the TIP Affiliates we do have. They were difficult to establish for the reasons mentioned above. But once established, they have become well regarded and integral parts of their local communities.

So let our efforts to expand TIP far and wide (and in our own backyards) continue, recognizing that entering territories where we are considered outsiders and interlopers is difficult. Having a wonderful program and good intentions won't win the day.

Persistence will.

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