

MY VIEW



Founder Wayne Fortin



CALL SHARING

It was the fall of 1985. The first class of TIP volunteers (the TIP Pioneers) had graduated, and they were ready to begin responding to TIP calls. I would describe my experience at the time as “curious” ... would this “good idea” actually work? None of us knew. But whether it worked or not, I looked forward to returning to my job as a mental health professional.

For the next few months, TIP calls began trickling in. At our monthly meeting, we couldn't wait to hear from the TIP volunteers who were called out that month. We sat at the edge of our seats listening to volunteers describe what happened on their calls. We called this **call sharing**.

Each call was different, but in many ways the volunteer experience was the same... anxiously trying to find the location... calmly entering a chaotic situation... connecting with a stranger... managing a gathering family... helplessly confronting inconsolable grief... working to solve complex problems... leaving very grateful clients... and returning home as if nothing unusual had happened.

Amazing!

I didn't realize it at the time, but hearing volunteers tell their TIP calls was gradually but certainly changing me from a curious observer of TIP to a passionate participant. I was sold... I was now all in. What started as my job became my life's work. And it was all because I heard over and over again volunteers sharing their compelling, tragic, courageous, miraculous TIP calls.

Recently I visited a TIP Chapter and attended their continuing education meeting where volunteers shared their recent TIP calls. It brought me back to the **call sharing** I experienced years ago when my passion for TIP was ignited. And here I was once again listening in awe at the courage, compassion and selflessness shown by TIP volunteers as they responded to help strangers in trouble.

What is different now about the call sharing process is that over the years we have expanded it beyond our volunteer meetings to the general public. Volunteers now share their calls at training classes, board meetings, fundraisers, and community presentations. Of course, the calls that are shared are disguised to protect the privacy of clients.

I have come to believe that sharing TIP calls is the only way to really ignite passion for TIP in those unfamiliar with our organization. I have seen it repeatedly... new volunteers, board members, community members and donors who think TIP is OK become passionate supporters when they hear volunteers talk about their TIP calls.

My presentations to groups about TIP these days are much different than in the early days when I used to focus on just the TIP facts... number of volunteers, partnering agencies, history (boring to most!). These days I **call share**. I present one or two actual TIP calls (details altered of course). When I do, I can see the "lights go on" in the audience, and the side talking and eating stop. Hearing TIP calls stops listeners in their tracks, and in many cases passionate supporters are born.

And when I am asked by individuals (like I frequently am), "What's TIP?" I don't respond by talking about our organization. I share a TIP call.

Here is an example...

"Our volunteers respond to assist people like Mary, who awakened to find her husband of 50 years dead next to her. When I arrived, she was alone except for a police officer standing in the hallway. Her son was enroute but was 3 hours away. I stayed with Mary until her son arrived. I held her hand, reminisced with her about her marriage, and basically was just there so she wouldn't be alone. I will never forget the hug Mary gave me when I was leaving and the gratefulness her son expressed that I was with his mother."

TIP calls involve lights and sirens, tragedy, loss, courage, compassion, resiliency, love, and anger. These real-life TIP Calls are what makes us the unique organization we are...

Let's Share Them!

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