

October 25, 2007

To Whom it May Concern

The Auditing Staff of the City of Los Angeles must interact with a widely disparate group of clients, such as the police, fire, and public works departments. They are required to telephone, email, interview, and observe their clients and inspect their documents. When the auditing process is completed, auditors must write reports that not only delineate what they investigated, but also recommend improvements that their clients could (and should) implement. Theirs is not an easy communications task.

When I served as Controller for the City of Los Angeles, I wanted my auditing staff to continually upgrade their communications skills. It was my task to find a consulting firm that could individualize the necessary concepts to City of Los Angeles auditors, while holding to standards set by organizations such as the Institute of Internal Auditors. Was I asking too much to hope that these training programs would be fun, too? The answer was no; fun was inherently part of the approach that Elena DeVos took in the two-day training programs she presented annually to the auditing staff over the course of three years. Dr. DeVos developed the workshops with Mary Holmes, who guided the improvisation workshop segments.

Although course topics were particular to the auditing staff (such as “Giving Writing Feedback with Finesse”), the entire training approach replicated the communications camp that Elena DeVos and Mary Holmes offer. In the third year of training, Ms. Holmes co-presented with Dr. DeVos, to the delight of the auditors. They role-played difficult situations they faced as auditors, they modeled methods of telling people about problematic situations, and they created various endings to well-known fairy tales — all while laughing and learning. Frankly, once the staff members got over their initial hesitation and shyness, they almost refused to leave the front of the room. The highly interactive improvisational exercises improved my staff’s individual self-confidence in their communications ability. Furthermore, the team developed a tighter camaraderie.

Elena and Mary pride themselves on combining the best of the academic and theatrical worlds to make learning communications skills easy, fun, useful, and immediately applicable. I have seen their approach in action and have been very pleased with the results..

Yours truly,

Rick Tuttle  
Los Angeles City Controller  
1985-2001

