

IMPROV TRICKS for Practice Conversations

Ding/Honk

Four participants work to keep a conversation on track with the help of a bell and a horn.

Setup:

You'll need a horn and a bell (You can invite participants to make a buzzer sound or say "Ding" if you want to go lo-fi.)

Works best at a table – great for tabletop practice

How it works:

Two participants take on the role of rep and HCP/customer. Two other participants will guide the rep with constant feedback via a bell and a horn. One other participant will have a bell and they will "ding" whenever the rep handles a moment in a great way. The other participant will hold a horn and they will "Honk" whenever the rep handles something poorly, misses an opportunity or could just *do better*. Fortunately, after a Honk, the speaker can rewind a bit and try a different path forward, hopefully receiving a Ding along the way.

Why it works:

This exercise lowers the stakes for trial and error, and opens up the conversation about the difference between 'good' and 'great.' The playfulness of the sound effects allow a rep to quickly replay a moment with a different outcome.

Debrief Questions:

(Of the rep) What did you notice when you got Honked? How did you shift your approach?

(Of the HCP) Anything you wish they would have said or done differently?

(Of the observers) How else could they have navigated that moment?

Pro Tips:

- The HCP/Customer should not get dinged/honked!
- If a statement gets a simultaneous ding/honk – that's something to explore in the debrief
- Gamify it with an award for most dings/least honks

Choosing a Point of Focus:

Select a clear point of focus in a call. The more specific, the better. For example –

- asking questions that show insight
- building constructive tension in your sales model
- addressing an adverse reaction
- navigating a tough call with a newly identified HCP persona using new data

Objectives:

Illustrate the difference between better and best in navigating particular moments.

Encouraging new approaches to old talk tracks.

Getting into the customer's perspective.

Variation:

A sales manager can 'demo' in the role of the rep, making subtle missteps that their team should catch.

The person playing the HCP can also be invited to Ding or Honk along the way.

Use it for:

Objection or question handling; practicing new product language; new reps

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Tag Out Practice Conversation

Imagine if you could ‘phone a friend’ as easily as a game of tag during your next tough conversation.

Setup:

- Position two participants as if in a conversation – standing or seated.
- One is the Rep, one is an HCP or a gatekeeper.
- Just outside of each of them is another participant standing by to ‘tag in’ to take over the conversation, either for the Rep or the HCP.

How it works:

Set up a practice conversation with a clear focus and a goal, for example, managing an objection. Two participants will begin the conversation as the rep and the HCP. Each player has a ‘backup’ player observing them – one for the rep and one for the HCP. As the conversation proceeds, those backup players can tag into the conversation. To do this, they can physically tap the other player on the shoulder to take over the role, continuing right where they left off. The other player in the role play simply shifts their focus accordingly as if nothing has happened. At any time, the backup player can hand the conversation back to the original rep to pick it up again. Meanwhile, the person playing the HCP also has a backup player who can tag in/out of the conversation to raise the stakes or provide a tough follow-up question.

Why it works:

In observing a conversation from the outside, we often have great ideas or insights. This allows the observer to immediately try out their idea. Additionally, if a rep is struggling at a particular juncture, it creates an opportunity for another person to show (rather than tell about) another approach.

Debrief Questions:

(Of the rep) What surprised you? What is something you can take to the bank from that conversation?
(Of the HCP) What did you learn from taking on that role? In your own role, what might you do differently now that you’ve stood in that point of view?
(Of the observers) Anything you would have done differently if you’d been in the conversation?

Pro Tips:

- This should feel collaborative, not competitive. The rep and their backup player are working together to navigate the conversation.
- Set a clear point of focus for the call.
- If the players are making a big deal of the tag ins with comments like “You look different” or “Did you change your voice?” gently encourage them to get back on track with “It’s the same person, stay in the conversation.”

Objectives:

Seeing possible paths through a difficult conversation
Sharing perspective

Variation:

The Rep or the HCP can be invited to ‘toss’ the focus to their backup player, giving them a chance to phone a friend when they want help or another perspective.
The manager can play any of the roles to model behaviors through the conversation.
At a table, any of the other players could tag in for the rep to keep everybody involved throughout