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<sup>1</sup> Source: Ron Cottle  
<sup>2</sup> Source: Ron Cottle
Getting the Word Out

The ALSHS Marketing Committee is pleased to provide you with an update of “Getting the Word Out,” the RI International (RI) Public Relations Guide, which is filled with ideas, tips and suggestions about how to spread the word about RI International or RI-Discovery groups in your Area.

Of course, as an Area Team Member/Group Leader, everything you do for RI could be considered public relations - from welcoming the newcomer to attending your monthly leaders' meeting. However, the thing that makes public relations efforts so challenging is that the sky's the limit once we start thinking of ways to let the public know about our RI Method.

Right about now you may be having an average response to an average situation: "Oh, no, not another responsibility. I can't do this or don't have time." Well, the purpose of this guide is to help you make a firm decision about how to increase public relations efforts just by being average.

We suggest that you look for a Group Leader, Assistant Leader or member in your area who may have had public relations experience or would like to be trained in PR, to act as the Area's Public Relations Coordinator. You can sit down with your PR Coordinator/volunteers and then plan, decide and act on efforts that will help promote RI in your Area. The PR Coordinator can then ask other members to help with specific jobs, such as handling mailings, making phone calls, obtaining contact information, etc.

Area Leaders who currently have Public Relations Coordinators report a great boost to public relations efforts in their Area and often an increase in attendance at meetings after any publicity about RI.

If you have any thoughts or questions about the ideas we have presented, please do not hesitate to contact us. Meanwhile, take a look at the update of the Public Relations Guide and tell us what you think of it. These materials are available on the Outreach page of the ALSHS website (http://www.lowselfhelpsystems.org/meetings/outreach-materials.asp). Hard copies are available by calling Headquarters. You may copy and share any of this material with anyone in the Area who is interested in promoting RI.
Getting more members involved in PR

Use the tools of the Method itself to help you and your members do PR in your Area. First, it is so important to endorse for every effort, no matter how small. Anything that one might do is admirable, from licking an envelope all the way up to doing a television show. Even members who have little time and/or interest in marketing can making a small contribution like telling their doctor about RI or posting an announcement on a bulletin board.

Here is another concept that may be applicable: the larger, more challenging tasks can be taken in "part acts" in order to make them more manageable. Let's say I want to write a personal letter to the editor of the local newspaper and tell him or her about RI representing my own viewpoint. One day I may see what papers are circulated in my area, another day I can get started on a letter by doing just an outline of what I want to say, another day write half of it, another day write the other half, and finally on the last day review and proof it and then mail it. If I endorse as I work on each part act it becomes easier to complete.

Some people are held back from making PR efforts by a vague nagging feeling that there is something wrong with promoting RI; in other words, "fearful temper." Our true goal as given in our Mission Statement is not to promote RI but rather "to help individuals gain skills to lead more peaceful and productive lives." There is certainly no right or wrong in making a suffering human being aware of something that might help them! It would be "group minded" to do such an act. And that is essentially what PR is; after that it is up to the mental health consumer to decide whether or not to attend (i.e. it is then "outer environment") - we have done our part.

Do you still have stigma about doing PR? Well, here is something to remember: people generally look up to not down at someone who has worked to improve his or her mental health, so we can work at changing our own attitude.

Another point to consider when encountering reluctance to make PR efforts: doing the thing "we fear and dread to do" can be beneficial to our mental health and build our nerve resistance. And if the effort does not bear fruit, that is merely "distressing but not dangerous" and again, one can always endorse for the effort. When an effort is successful, one is very likely to experience a boost in self-confidence and well-being.

Use the Method to help you do PR and you may not only attract some suffering people to RI, but also enhance your own mental health at the same time!
Places to distribute materials:

Health fairs
Libraries
Supermarket bulletin boards
Coffee shops
Pharmacies
Hospital waiting rooms
Beauty parlors
Clinics
Community centers
Emergency rooms
Laundromats
Counseling centers
Church bazaars
Court related programs
Senior citizen centers
Veterans’ organizations
Public buildings
Government offices
Teachers’ lounges
Doctor's and dentist's offices
Adult education centers
Community/public health departments

Some ways to distribute brochures throughout the community:

- Contact a facility by phone or in person to ask if they will accept literature from our nonprofit organization for display. Visit the site to show them the brochures in order to emphasize it will be kept neat. Describe RI's mission and activities in the community. State that we take a voluntary contribution at the meeting but there is no required fee.
- Choose a few blocks, take a handful of materials and walk from building to building entering every building where the public is welcome and ask if you can post your information in that building.
- Ask your local library if they will distribute brochures to the branches in their system.

Wherever you distribute materials be sure to drop by regularly to refill the supply.
PR that anyone can do

There are many ways to reach out and let people know about RI. There is distribution of brochures, newspaper listings and stories, Craigslist posting and other online postings, radio and television and our unique and effective tool, the Demonstration Panel. The following are ideas for using these PR tools and the volunteers in your Area. As you will see, the list starts with the simplest tasks, some that any member of the group can do. Then it goes on to include those activities that require more skill and coordination by the Area Leader.

- Encourage group members to talk about RI to family and friends and invite those who are interested to join them at the meetings. If each person tells one other person there will be a big impact.
- Ask group members to take literature to their own professionals and tell their RI story. They can be encouraged to speak to anyone in their personal network: psychiatrist, psychologist, counselor, medical doctor, social worker, clergy, dentist or Employee Assistance Professional (EAP) at work.
- Ask members for ideas where to put brochures or tear-away flyers, and if they are willing to take materials to those places. Review all of the RI literature to determine when you should use it. Leave reading material where people are waiting.
- Suggest that group members invite their professionals to attend a RI meeting.
- If a group member's employer has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), take literature to the EAP staff and offer to do a demonstration panel. Invite them to a meeting. Or take information to the Human Resources Department or the head of personnel.
- Ask members to inquire about company or community health fairs.
- Write a "payback" letter, that is, a letter thanking the person who referred you to RI. That might be a newspaper columnist, a doctor, friend or someone else.
Networking in the community

Friends

Talk with your friends about how RI has helped you at social gatherings where you feel most comfortable. This is a great place to start if you're having problems with stigma. We all know what RI has done for us. We can all share our experiences and success. Being spontaneous about the Method is always attractive.

At work

There are often opportunities to share your knowledge about RI with colleagues at work. Every family has someone struggling with mental health issues. Remember research shows that in any given year one in five people is struggling with a mental health issue and most don’t seek treatment. Without appearing pushy you can tell people about this low cost community resource. Try getting a short announcement about RI's weekly meetings listed in the company newsletter. Give brochures to the company nurse, EAP or personnel office.

Conferences or meetings

Any group meeting you attend is a potential place to spread the word. Most especially, if you are attending a conference or meeting that has some type of focus on health and wellness, take a few RI brochures with you. Ask if there is a "take one" table where you can leave a few of them.

Service clubs

Clubs like Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, etc. often need a speaker each week all year round. They are always looking for speakers. Call an officer of the organization and ask to be placed on the speaker's roster whenever there is an opening. You may consider asking the organization for a donation after you have made a presentation.
Networking with health professionals and other sources of referrals

Introduction

An important branch of public relations is establishing contact (through a combination of publicity and personal contacts) with professionals who could refer patients/consumers to RI meetings. The professional can provide assistance by: 1) hosting a demonstration panel before groups of professionals or patients, 2) providing meeting space for new groups, 3) referring patients and professionals to groups.

What is the best way to inform professionals about RI? The most accurate answer is that there is no single best way. It will take some effort on your part, but you will eventually find the best ways that work for your Area.

Try, Fail; Try, Fail; Try, Succeed!

One person’s story – how Rosanne Pragnell finally succeeded

For several years I have tried to make contact with a local hospital. I have tried several people, but these contacts did not work out. One day in March I received a phone call from that hospital’s psychiatric day treatment program. On the phone, the contact, Crystal, asked me about RI - who we are and what we do. I told her, and she sounded very interested. I also mentioned that I could send her a packet of RI information. However, I suggested I drop it off in person instead of mailing it, so that we could meet face to face, and she said that would be fine. When I got there to drop off the packet and the brochures, she and I had about a 20-minute conversation in her office.

After we talked about RI, she said she had many more contacts she could supply to me. Indeed, I just received a very complimentary letter from her (regarding RI), along with ten more possible contacts. In the letter, Crystal also said that she would promote the possibility of a RI demonstration among the staff at the day treatment program.

From all this success, I learned never give up. Keep Trying.

Steps toward building relationships with health professionals

Ask your group leaders to brainstorm a list of professionals (healthcare providers, psychologists, social workers, school counselors, clergy, etc.) whom they know personally. These could be their personal healthcare providers, family members or friends. Then brainstorm key community leaders who might be interested in self-help, such as directors of hospital-based programs, the Mental Health Association, or the Employee Assistance Association. Most organizations now have websites.

Invite the leaders to contact health care professionals to seek either a personal interview or a telephone contact (see Introductory Letters to Mental Health Professionals). Ask for only a brief amount of their time, since you want to offer courtesy to busy professionals. Sometimes it is helpful to contact an assistant such as a nurse or secretary as the professional may not have time but the assistant can pass on the information.
Identify yourself as a community volunteer and give a brief history of RI and your involvement. State the benefits you have received from the RI Method. If there is an opportunity for training staff or attending a staff meeting, offer to conduct a demonstration.

Ask if you can leave RI literature for distribution to patients. Be sure to include a group meeting list for groups in that vicinity.

Send a thank-you letter after making a telephone call or personal visit.

Regular contact with the professionals is highly recommended.

**Talking points for a reach-out call to a professional**

The RI Method offers cognitive behavioral techniques. Today it is recommended that patients see a professional, receive therapy and also learn cognitive methods for reframing daily incidents in their lives.

RI benefits include support from others who have “been there” as well as providing specific coping techniques.

The RI meetings offer patients encouragement to practice the techniques they are learning in a supportive environment.

RI members are expected to cooperate with and accept the authority of their professional (e.g., psychiatrist, counselor, employee assistance professional, social worker, clergy member, et al). The weekly meeting provides demonstration and practice in how to reduce the discomfort of symptoms and to manage fear and anger.

Once RI principles are being used, the patient/consumer will be better prepared to face the stress of daily living.

RI can benefit professionals by reducing the number of panic calls, increasing patient self-reliance, and improving patient compliance with the treatment regimen.

Refer patients/customers with emotional disorders, those having difficulty coping with day-to-day problems, patients who are awaiting treatment, substance abusers who are experiencing emotional symptoms.

RI has always believed that people can get well; that there is no hopeless case.
C. Reach-out to clergy

Every community has a clergy association; some have more than one. Usually you can learn how to contact these organizations through the public library's community listing service or website.

You may wish to contact the presiding officer of the clergy association in your community to offer a brief presentation about RI at the regular clergy meeting. If your RI group meets in a church or synagogue, make a special appointment to speak with the pastor or rabbi. Suggest that a RI demonstration will be helpful to introduce our services to the pastoral care committee or ministry committee. Oftentimes we overlook reaching out to the audience where we hold our meetings (see Introductory Letters to Clergy).

D. Reach-out to schools, universities, and colleges

The average age of RI group attendees is getting older. Attracting younger people to our meetings will help us attain our goal of making RI groups secure for future generations.

It is logical to target students because they are young and live in concentrated numbers around campuses. For many, college life is the time when nervous symptoms start to appear. Juggling classes, study, work, family and socializing can put a strain on life and relationships. It can lead to worry and lack of sleep and lower resistance. Students who learn to cope better are more likely to succeed and remain in school.

The following may help you get started: Maybe a group member, friend or relative knows a student who would help post RI fliers or handbills on bulletin boards. If the campus radio or newspaper does a feature on RI that result in new members, you may be able to enlist their help.

Whom to contact: Director of Student Services, Counseling Center (Sample Letter #4) Human Resources Department, Campus Nurse or Health Services, Psychology Department, Directors of health related programs such as social work or nursing. Often these programs will ask their students to visit a meeting to observe and/or invite a representative to speak to a class.

Don’t forget to supply these departments with brochures and let them know about the telephone and online meetings. Invite everyone to visit our website at: http://www.lowselfhelpsystems.org/ (see Introductory Letter to Colleges and Universities).

E. Employee Assistance Programs

Many companies have a human resources department to assist employees with issues, including mental health. They may either make referrals directly or have an outside company that the employee may contact directly. These people are often referred to as Employee Assistance Professionals (EPAs).

EAPs may use RI. Networking with an EAP or sending a letter (see Introductory Letters to Employee Assistance Professionals).
The letter may enumerate the following possible benefits of RI for the EAP.

- RI offers long-term aftercare.
- RI support is cost effective to both the employer and employee.
- RI demonstrations are available for staff.
- RI treatment does not supplant the professional's treatment.
- RI offers peer to peer support and demonstrates how others have learned to cope with similar problems.

**F. Responding to requests for information**

From time you will receive a request for information about Recovery International. It is important to respond in a timely fashion including information about Recovery International as well as encourage further involvement by attending a meeting and/or sponsoring a panel demonstration (see Response to an Inquiry Regarding Recovery).

**G. Directories or online searches**

At the library, ask to be shown all of the service directories for your vicinity. These may include a United Way directory of (human services.) These directories are published annually by a citizen's group or by the public library as a community service. Our goal is to get RI meetings listed in the directory.

In the telephone book there are listings under headings like Mental Health, Self-Help or Social Services. A call to the telephone company will give you information about how your group may be listed. There is usually a charge for this service. You can also seek a listing on various hotlines or phone referral lines at hospitals or some other social service agency. Be sure to contact your local chapters of NAMI and Mental Health America to be added to their resource lists.

The Internet is also a link for resources in your area. Use a search engine like www.google.com and search using key words like anxiety, bipolar, self-help groups, plus your location.”
H. Demonstration Panels

Demonstration panels are still an excellent way to develop relationships with professionals in the community. Networking equals referrals, and referrals equal new members. The demonstration can be offered to anyone. However, you may wish to focus first on professionals who can make referrals to your RI groups. The priority group would include doctors, nurses, social workers, therapists and clergy. An important secondary group would be classes of nursing and medical students. Beyond that you can offer panels for service clubs such as the Rotary Club, women's groups, etc.

There are two styles of panels available - the standard one-hour panel with 3-6 participants or the alternative form for 10-30 minutes using one to two people.

Where can you conduct demo panels?

* hospitals (for psychiatric and professional staff)

* continuing education programs

  • mental health agencies

  • social service agencies

* counseling staff of colleges and universities

* clergy associations.

If turned down for a demonstration panel, ask if they have a health fair where RI literature can be displayed.

Panel members should be selected based on a balance of veterans and newer members, young and old, male and female. Those who are less experienced in their practice are valuable to demonstrate what can be accomplished in a short period of time. The panel members should be experienced enough to offer an effective demonstration of the method.
I. How we do a demonstration panel

Step One: Locate a place to hold the demo panel

Ask yourself where a panel demonstration would do the most good. For starters how about hospital discharge units, mental health clinics, clergy association meetings, in-patient programs or day treatment units? Brainstorm even more possibilities with other group leaders. Demo panels should always be coordinated through the Area Leader or the Panel Coordinator.

Step Two: Make the approach

Look around for opportunities to make an approach to a potential referral source. What personal contacts do you have in the community with social service agencies, treatment programs or drop in centers? Make a friendly call or drop by for a visit. Try to locate the right person to talk to about doing a demo panel. Start by asking for the person in charge of in-service education or staff meetings. State that you are from Recovery International (Remember that some other groups use the word RI in their titles so use the full title of Recovery International) Give a brief history of the organization to establish its credibility. You will find a history in the Healthcare Providers Guide.

Be clear in your description of the service you are offering. Say that a panel is a demonstration of the RI method in action. It allows a brief view of what happens in a RI self-help group meeting. Send a letter of introduction to the contact person (see Offer to Conduct a Panel Demonstration).

Follow up with a phone call. Keep trying if you do not reach the contact person. Polite, but persistent is a good rule to follow. When scheduling a panel, remember that professionals often have tight schedules, so offer to fit your demonstration into their time frame. An hour is preferable but a half-hour is possible if you present one example.

Offer to give a demo panel during a regularly scheduled staff or "in-service" meeting. If they want to offer continuing education units for staff, asking one of the professionals to introduce the panel will qualify.

Step Three: Laying the groundwork

After the panel is scheduled, send a letter of confirmation. This written communication helps to avoid potential confusion about the time and place (see Confirmation of Panel Demonstration).

Step Four: Give the panel demonstration as follows

Tell the audience how long the presentation will take. Then briefly describe what will happen: introduction of panel members; brief history of RI; examples of how it works; time for questions.

Ask the panel members to introduce themselves including a very brief summary of the symptoms that brought them to RI.

Offer a brief history of RI outlining its history, purpose and development.
Abraham Low Self-Help Systems is an international nonprofit self-help organization that provides weekly group meetings in this community in public locations. The group meetings are called Recovery International or RI-Discovery. A donation is suggested but it is not required. We have included a list of group meetings in your packet. Through RI's self-help method, participants learn a system of cognitive/behavioral techniques for controlling temperamental behavior and changing attitudes toward nervous symptoms and fears. The meetings are an adjunct to professional care. The self-help techniques used by RI members were developed from the mid 1930s to the early 1950s by the late Abraham Low, M.D., Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Illinois Medical School.

Give examples of RI practice. Begin by reading or explaining the following:

When we give examples, we give them in four steps - the event, the symptoms we experienced, how we used the RI Method and the temperamental reaction and symptoms we would have experienced informer days.

You will notice in the example that symptoms are mentioned. These symptoms have been diagnosed as nervous in origin. RI as a lay organization, can offer no diagnosis, treatment, advice or counsel. RI members are expected to follow the authority of their own physician or other professional.

You may also notice our use of the word "temper" as in fearful or angry temper. We would like to explain briefly RI's unique concept of temper. Angry temper is the judgment that someone else is wrong and I am right; fearful temper is the judgment that I am wrong and someone else is right.

Give two or three different examples with brief spotting from the other panel members. At demonstrations we do not read from the book(s), read the 4-step example sheet or have mutual aid (although depending on the host organization they may offer refreshments and a chance to mingle with the audience and answer further questions).

Answer questions from the audience. Remind the audience that you are not professionals and are only qualified to answer questions about RI If you do not know the answer, offer to find out and get back to them or refer them to Headquarters (312-337-5661). Think securely. This will give you another opportunity to make contact with them.

Be sure to give participants some handouts including the group meeting schedule for your area.

7. If you are giving a demo for professionals, ask for business cards from the audience so that you can build a list of professionals in your area.

If the time allotted for the panel demonstration is less than one hour, you can adjust the time by reducing the number of examples and by keeping introductions and questions and answers brief. If the allotted time is less than 30 minutes, or if only one or two people are providing the panel, then use one example and adjust other time as needed.

Step Five: Immediately after the panel demonstration
Call the contact person a few days after the panel demonstration with a reminder that referrals are always welcome at RI meetings. Offer to send them a quantity of informational brochures for distribution to their clients. Be sure to send the contact person a thank you note offering to do another demo panel in the future.

**Step Six: Keep the contact warm**

Stay in touch with your contact person by calling from time to time. If no referrals are forthcoming, ask for another opportunity to demonstrate the method. Some facilities have actually requested that a regular panel demonstration be offered to their clients. Call to say thank-you for referrals that come your way. Keep up the relationship by sending current meeting lists, offering another panel and inviting them to a local activity they might find interesting.

**Step Seven: Endorse for the effort!**

Keep making those contacts and looking for opportunities to do a demo panel in your community.