



# Conducting Multiple Group Role Plays for Sales Training

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**Done properly, role plays can be one of the most powerful learning tools because they can closely simulate an actual customer interaction and enable associates to practice soft skills. Role plays allow participants to incorporate techniques into their own styles and make them “fit” their own approaches. With structured feedback, your participants can easily see ways to apply techniques and get positive results.**

Some of your participants, and perhaps you as well, may have had a negative experience in the past with role plays. Maybe you were required to perform before a group, or the set up made the role play impractical or awkward. Negative experiences are unnecessary...and you can make the difference between a good experience and a bad one!

First, always use multiple group role plays. In other words, divide the participants into smaller sub-groups and conduct the exercise simultaneously. The level of noise and activity across the room minimizes any intimidation. Never ask a participant to “perform” in front of the group.

While there can be many different purposes, a common role-play situation is when there is a banker, customer, and an observer. Begin each role play by distributing copies of the various roles to the participants. Allow each person a few minutes to study the roles. If the group has not experienced role plays, you may want to call the participants into a hallway or a corner of the room to quickly review and reinforce their roles. This allows you to set the stage for the role plays and to make sure all participants understand how to proceed.



The observer should be given a checklist or series of things to observe during the interaction. The observer feedback can be the most helpful of all because observers are peers and are specifically tasked to point out key items.

Challenge the group by encouraging participants to use their newly learned skills and techniques. Urge them to play their roles as though they were the person in the case, not as they think that person would act. Ask participants not to refer to papers or handouts during the actual role play (this encourages them to act more naturally). Encourage imagination and empathy in the role play.

When all the groups are ready, signal for the role play to begin. During the exercise, circulate among the groups to answer questions and to assist a group that may be having challenges getting started or truly living into the nature of the exercise. After all groups have completed their role plays, rely on the observers to discuss what happened in each role play. In addition, ask the participants what they learned, how they felt, and how easy or difficult it was, thus comparing and contrasting experiences. This synergy enhances the learning.

Summarize the group's experience and conclude by leading a discussion on how they can apply their experiences to practical situations. Once involved, most people find role plays "easier than they thought," and a true replication of what "happens on the job."

