**Part 2. Crisis Management and Homeless Training-20220916\_130054-Meeting Recording (2)**

0:02  
Hopefully you can hear me.

0:05  
I'm having just a little bit of some some technical issues with my, my camera today.

0:11  
So in the the interest of not repeating, yeah, Wednesday's debacle where I kind of got caught cut off.

0:22  
We'll just stick with audio, so hopefully that won't be too distracting.

0:26  
Can you give me just a thumbs up or a yes in the chat If you have audio, If you can see my screen. Okay,

0:38  
great!

0:38  
Thank you.

0:39  
Thank you.

0:39  
All right.

0:41  
Well, good afternoon.

0:42  
I hope everyone is doing well today.

0:47  
I don't know about you all.

0:48  
This week felt like a a long journey to to Friday.

0:53  
I want to upload a couple of documents to the chat. So I'm uploading the participant guide for this course and also a job a that we'll look at later in this lesson.

1:16  
So when we met last week, our focus was customer service and and public service and I wanted to pick up a little bit where we left last week as we move into the lesson today, which focuses on difficult conversations, mainly those that are involving veterans that are in crisis.

1:40  
So when we left last week, we were talking about how important it is to be an assertive communicator and having ownership of the situation or or issue at hand using those “I” statements, using those techniques and skills.

2:02  
And I wanted to just take a a step back and remind us of those different communication, those common communication techniques, the passive, assertive and aggressive focusing mainly on assertive communication, just reminding ourselves that when we are in assertive communication, we have self-esteem.

2:26  
We take others needs into account, including our own needs.

2:30  
We're able to say no in a calm and direct way.

2:33  
We're able to express ourselves clearly and confidently and that's so important as we talk about customer service.

2:44  
And customer service can oftentimes be easier when we have those customers that we're working with that are eager for our help, they're engaged, they're actively taking part of the conversation that we are in.

3:04  
But sometimes we do have difficult conversations that we have to navigate through.

3:10  
Before we, you know, close out this section, I wanna remind ourselves of some of those traits that we want to exhibit for that courteous and professional interaction.

3:25  
So if we're placing the veteran on hold, which I recognize you may not have a physical hold button when you're doing the survey calls, but even if it's a silent hold, is is what we call it.

3:41  
So where you might tell the caller, I'm gonna do some research on your file, I'm gonna look at this issue a little bit more, I'm gonna look at the notes.

3:50  
I'm still here.

3:51  
You may not hear me, but I'm still here, right?

3:54  
And just reminding the caller that you're there when you're doing that type research can really help to lower that anxiety and really is a great trait of an assertive caller, right?

4:04  
Setting the pace.

4:05  
An assertive speaker.

4:06  
Setting the pace of the conversation.

4:09  
Using common courtesy by addressing the veteran by their last name.

4:14  
Using sir /ma'am

4:15  
Avoiding using the first name of the Veteran unless they give you permission to do so.

4:21  
Watching our tone.

4:24  
Refraining from using slaying and, you know, definitely refraining from using profane language.

4:31  
Keeping personal opinions to ourselves about the, you know, various topics, government, politics, etc.

4:42  
And keeping the attention in that conversation focused on that veteran, that customer that you're speaking with.

4:49  
One big thing that we can do that is within our control is avoiding interruptions.

4:56  
So making sure that when you do that contact back that it's a good time, that you're in a good place, that it's not loud in your area, there's not distractions in your area.

5:08  
Offering condolences when appropriate.

5:11  
The caller mentions you know someone has passed recently or they're going through a difficult time recognizing those instances and showing empathy. Obviously avoiding eating and chewing gum while we're on the phone so that we come across professional and refraining from personal conversations and inappropriately disconnecting the call.

5:34  
And one way we can really prevent ourselves from inappropriately disconnecting the conversation is have a step in your conversation process that leads both yourself and the person that you're speaking to into a natural close.

5:49  
I really like doing that with a question by asking the caller before we disconnect, "is there anything else I can help you with today"?

5:58  
Did you have any other questions?

6:00  
I think we discussed in the group with the group last week that many of you used this opportunity to thank the veteran for their service or thank the the customer that you're speaking with for the veterans service.

6:11  
And those can also be really great professional and natural ways to come to a closing in the conversation.

6:22  
When we think about difficult conversations that we have right, we think about conversations like delivering bad news to someone or giving someone negative feedback.

6:35  
Or perhaps, you know, discussing with someone negative feedback that they've provided to you.

6:42  
And so having to listen to their point of view, listen to their perspective, not take it personally.

6:49  
Using all those skills that we've talked about so far to be able to be open and empathetic. Acknowledging mistakes can also be a difficult conversation.

7:00  
We talked about part of being an assertive communicator is taking responsibility for the mistakes or the the issues of the agency where it may not have been your own personal mistake or own personal issue.

7:17  
But recognizing that ownership and recognizing that it goes a long way for the customer and building rapport for the customer, when we're able to say yes, you know a mistake was made here, let's see what we can do to get that fixed or let's see what our next best step is.

7:36  
And something that we're gonna focus in as we go through this lesson and later in the slides is discussing and and speaking with someone that is having a mental health emergency or is experiencing A hardship.

7:48  
And those can be very sensitive conversations.

7:51  
Those can be obviously very difficult conversations, but they're really important conversations for us to talk about because they really can make a huge difference in that individuals you know life, right and and perception of where VA is and and how VA cares.

8:12  
So when we talk about how do we handle difficult conversations and and just like many other things we want to make sure that we prepare ourselves right so that we are prepared whether that be mentally So we're well rested.

8:31  
We're not going into.

8:32  
I know for me I can't go into a a really important conversation if I'm hungry, right?

8:38  
If I haven't taken care of myself in that way. Do I know what I want to achieve?

8:45  
And even more difficult sometimes, do I know what the person I'm speaking with wants to achieve?

8:51  
And oftentimes we don't know that without asking questions and without listening.

8:56  
When we need to deliver difficult news, it's important that we deliver that message promptly and clearly, right?

9:03  
We don't want to let that information kind of fester, so to speak, and run the risk of getting worse if not addressed right?

9:16  
Focus on the facts and tell the truth.

9:19  
We don't wanna make false promises where we would definitely negatively affect the veterans perspective of VA if we're making false promises on things and they fall through.

9:31  
So focus on the facts.

9:32  
What information is available?

9:34  
What services are available?

9:35  
How long does it take to access those services and being honest and seeing the situation from the veterans point of view, being able to recognize and this is something that I learned when I was in the contact center and and doing phone interviews on a daily basis and and many of you have probably heard that saying that hurt people, hurt people, right.

10:00  
And you know, I think what that really boils down to is we forget sometimes that when someone is hurting, when someone is in pain, when someone is ill, when someone is anxious, when someone is frustrated, they will project those feelings onto the the people and the person that they're speaking with.

10:21  
And so their their words, their presence might come across as hurtful, as injuring, as painful, as you know, inducing anxiety, right?

10:35  
And we have to be able to not take those things personally, not take those projections personally and and not react right, that we have enough self-confidence in ourselves that we can engage in that conversation and not take on that person's emotion and feeling.

10:54  
And then that comes to our last bullet, right?

10:56  
Being able to stay calm, manage your own feelings.

11:00  
I think it's a really valuable skill to be able to throughout life, say what is yours and what is not yours.

11:10  
And when things are not mine, it is much easier to let them go right and to have those open hands and not not hold on to that person's reactions.

11:21  
Because again, it's not yours, It's just a projection, not gonna hold on to it.

11:30  
So be clear and specific.

11:32  
Focus on the facts.

11:34  
You know if you're speaking to someone who is frustrated about services they've received, maybe they have a misunderstanding, right?

11:42  
A misunderstanding can lead to a lot of frustration.

11:46  
Maybe they need education about the benefits processes.

11:49  
Maybe they need some direction and focusing on the facts, letting them know the the full truth about something can be really helpful when you're delivering that difficult message and can oftentimes turn that frustrated customer into a a customer who's now an an assertive communicator, which is what we want.

12:11  
Oftentimes individuals when they, when they don't know something, when they feel like they're being left out, they can have that sense of frustration.

12:19  
And so providing that education, providing that information can really help to close that gap.

12:25  
If you need more information about the situation, ask questions you know, be comfortable in not being an expert about everything.

12:34  
And when you don't know the answer, being able to say that's a great question,

12:37  
I need to find out more about that.

12:40  
You mentioned, several of you mentioned last week.

12:43  
You know, one way that you build rapport and trust with your customers, with your, with your Veterans that you work with is by doing what you say you're going to do.

12:53  
The Veteran asks you a question or says, hey, can you call back later you do that, allow the individual to explain themselves, ask questions.

13:04  
And sometimes, especially in our business line, we're not able to necessarily disclose all the ins and outs of the information, right.

13:11  
I would get, well, what did the examiner say in my examination?

13:16  
That must be why my claim was denied.

13:18  
And obviously, you know, not something we can discuss that is a FOIA request.

13:23  
And so, you know, not simply saying, well, I can't talk about that, but explaining unfortunately, you know, I can't discuss that without, you know, you submitting that request in writing and you can, you know, possibly receive some of those documents through that for your request.

13:38  
Would you like me to explain to you how to do that, take responsibility for your actions and reframe the situation in a positive light?

13:48  
Always look for those opportunities where we can turn those, those bad situations into a good situation.

13:55  
Always looking for that silver lining, right, but not being dishonest.

14:00  
We don't want to be, you know untruthful or give out, you know, bad information just to to try to to get the the customer, get the caller off the phone.

14:13  
So we want to stay calm, kind of do that physical top down checklist, take a deep breath, center your feelings.

14:30  
That really allows you to take a moment so that you're not gonna take the the individual's response personally, right.

14:40  
Acknowledge and respect the person's feelings.

14:43  
You know, I recognize you're going through a difficult time.

14:46  
I recognize this is very hard for you and give them time to express their feelings.

14:56  
You don't have to agree with other people's opinions or ideas or think that you know they're the best ideas or the best opinions.

15:03  
but just letting the individual express themselves really goes a long way.

15:08  
And showing that empathy where you're able to say truthfully within yourself.

15:15  
I can understand where they are going through this and that is why they are feeling this way.

15:26  
Sometimes it can be difficult to know how do, how to respond, right.

15:30  
And if you're not comfortable responding with someone when they are very emotional or maybe become angry and are being loud in their tone, that can really kind of knock you off, right?

15:45  
And and get you a little bit.

15:50  
Lose your confidence, right?

15:51  
Lose your confidence, so to speak, as you're in that conversation.

15:54  
So some good tips if the individual that you're speaking with, if they're angry, you know, recognizing anger is a natural emotion.

16:04  
Anger is part of the the grieving and coping process.

16:09  
So allow the person to vent.

16:12  
We used to kind of have this unwritten written rule that at 2 minutes was a good, you know, roundabout time to allow enough time to express themselves.

16:28  
Let let them, you know, get out their story or explanation of why they are frustrated and but still allows for the conversation to be productive, right?

16:43  
You don't want the whole conversation to be an anger vent, but we do want to allow that person to get those feelings out and to talk through those feelings.

16:53  
Everyone has to stop for a moment to breathe.

16:56  
Oftentimes when we're angry and venting, we're talking very quickly, maybe very loudly and inevitably we're gonna have to stop.

17:05  
And you hear that that can be a really good point to kind of slide in and say, you know, Sir, ma'am, I understand you're you're very upset and I and I also understand why you're upset.

17:19  
Maybe reframe some of the statements that they provided to you so that they really do have that understanding that you are listening to what they're saying, that you are empathetic to what they're experiencing.

17:34  
If they're in tears, you know, giving say similar to allowing the person to vent, give them a moment to compose themselves but also acknowledge that emotion it it can become more isolating and discomforting when someone is crying and someone that the then the person they're speaking with just kind of ignores that, right.

17:58  
It can make you feel even more upset.

18:02  
And so you know, recognize that that person is emotional.

18:07  
"I can, I can hear you're very upset.

18:10  
Do you need a moment" and and just, you know, recognize that not trying to just push through and and check the boxes right.

18:20  
And it might be appropriate in some of those instances.

18:23  
If the person is extremely emotional, you know to ask them if if it would be better for you to contact them back later or to to see if another time would be better if the person is frustrated.

18:34  
Similar to when someone is angry, and I think you know, frustration and anger can be very similar, they do have some differences.

18:43  
Oftentimes when someone is frustrated, they're often, you know, in the middle of a process and so that's when we can really acknowledge their frustration but also redirect them.

18:54  
So this would be the next step that you would want to take, right?

18:58  
Or maybe the the next step is waiting, right?

19:04  
And and and just being able to explain that to the individual really helps.

19:09  
If they're showing resistance, many times you have to focus on what is their end goal.

19:17  
So So what would you like to achieve?

19:20  
Sometimes you have to when someone is showing resistance, that might be their own wall to accepting help, right?

19:29  
They may figure, well, I'm not gonna get help anyways.

19:33  
You know why do I have to do this?

19:34  
Why do I have to even participate this, participate in this, and explaining to that customer.

19:40  
I understand, you know your past experiences have been frustrating or you're not sure that this is really gonna help filing this claim again,

19:50  
but let me explain to you why I think this time will be more successful for you.

19:56  
Or let me explain to you why I think this will be helpful and beneficial for you.

20:01  
And again, using that opportunity to educate, right, and to reach out and provide information, information about benefits, information about services to help to break down that wall a little bit, right.

20:14  
And reduce that that individual's resistance if the individual is passive and and that can be very frustrating when you have someone, it's almost like someone who is resistant, someone who is just like well, it doesn't matter.

20:29  
I don't really know, I don't really care.

20:33  
You know those are really great opportunities to ask questions like well what is your end goal?

20:37  
What would you like to achieve?

20:40  
What does the situation look like to you?

20:42  
And that gives you an opportunity to see from that veterans perspective what their kind of assumption is of the situation, what their reality is of the situation.

20:57  
If you've ever heard that, that saying perspective is reality.

21:01  
I think that really has a lot of mileage, especially in the veteran experience, right?

21:07  
When you have a veteran that their perspective is that VA is there for me, VA cares, VA is helpful.

21:14  
That is generally their reality.

21:16  
You have a Veteran whose perspective is VA is just gonna deny my claim.

21:22  
VA is, you know, gonna put me on a waiting list, then that tends to be that individual's reality.

21:27  
So asking questions and and seeing where that person's at, so you can meet them where they are and help bring them closer to their goal.

21:43  
And when we're in a conversation and I know this past couple of slides and and the main focus of today's lesson are those difficult conversations, specifically those conversations when the veteran is in crisis.

21:54  
But even in our, you know, general conversations, our conversations that go really well, it's important to have a natural close to the conversation that both recognizes and respects the importance of your time, but it also recognizes and respects the importance of the Veteran's time of the customer's time.

22:18  
So being careful to not let the conversation drag out once the questions have been answered, once the issues have been resolved, looking for signs in the conversation that OK, we are at a natural close maybe reframing or looking at your notes and guessing accomplish what you've discussed in the conversation if they're follow up steps that need to be completed.

22:44  
Hitting on those briefly and then looking for a way to bring that conversation to an end

22:50  
on a positive note. I think Jennifer mentioned this last class, but you know saying something like "really glad I got a chance to speak to you today".

23:01  
"Thank you for letting us circle back with you on your survey responses".

23:06  
"Thank you for taking time out of your day to speak with me, right".

23:10  
And then offering that caller, offering that veteran a chance to add anything that they may have missed.

23:17  
So we've said this already a couple times, but letting the veteran asking the veteran, did you have any other questions?

23:22  
Did you have any other issues that you want to talk about?

23:25  
Any benefits that you needed some clarification on, but just giving them that last opportunity before you in that conversation to discuss anything that might be on their mind.

23:43  
So we look at just closing out this, this part of the the lesson.

23:49  
When we look at our top five customer service traits, we wanna try to stay calm under pressure, have that emotional stability.

23:57  
You know, that can really be one thing that is within our control.

24:03  
So take care of yourself, you know, making sure that you're taking those important steps to avoid burnout, use critical thinking and creative thinking skills.

24:16  
So taking notes of the situation, so you're able to look at the situation from all of the different angles.

24:23  
Being knowledgeable about the different programs and benefits that are available can really help with that critical thinking and creativity because you might be aware of different programs and resources that can be really beneficial in those different conversations.

24:39  
Obviously having empathy and and being friendly without being a friend, right?

24:44  
Having that professional level of friendliness.

24:48  
Having those effective communication skills that include not only being able to speak professionally and having a good cadence and someone's able to understand you and you're not speaking in a lot of jargon or, you know, using profane language, but also being an active listener.

25:09  
Making sure that we're touching back with that person that we're speaking with so they know that we are present in the conversation.

25:18  
And then adaptability, you know and I think adaptability goes many different ways.

25:23  
In some ways adaptability is flexibility.

25:26  
So being able to make those changes when needed, being able to learn quickly and and understand new policy that's coming out and and benefits that are coming out and and and having that flexibility.

25:44  
Also being able to see the big picture, you know understanding where we are and and how important our role is in the the cogs of the wheel and the wheels of the machine, right.

25:57  
And recognizing that you know the work that we're doing and and I have to say, you know the work that you all are doing and communicating directly back with those veterans, you know in response to their surveys is really a critical piece because it allows us to get a better understanding from the field as to how our programs are being accessed.

26:22  
Are are they informed about our programs?

26:25  
Do we need to do better in advocating? Do we need to do better in promoting or you know, perhaps people know about programs and and know about services, but you know they're hitting bottlenecks in other areas.

26:42  
So being conscious of all of those different pieces that come together to really help us provide for that veteran a customer service experience that is more than they expect.

26:56  
So I would like to have just a, you know, a little bit of time for some group participation conversation.

27:06  
So if you would and you can raise your hand and come off mute or you can type in the chat.

27:12  
I would love for just a few examples that you might have experienced where you feel like you gave more than was expected to the customer that you were speaking with.

27:25  
We had some really great examples on Tuesday and one of the team members was talking about a veteran that they were helping that was in crisis.

27:36  
And they happened to ask the Veteran, you know, is there anyone in the home with you And their spouse was there with them.

27:42  
And so they got on the phone with the spouse and they were talking to the veteran's wife about all the, you know, things that the veteran was, was currently struggling with.

27:53  
And they were able to get the both the Veteran and the spouse some counseling assistants and really help the veteran through their benefits per and actually checked back in with the Veteran, the spouse several weeks after that event and the Veteran was just extremely thankful, was just very just and humbled that that someone was assisting them.

28:23  
And I don't know if anyone got a chance to listen to the town hall this past week, but the Secretary even mentioned there was someone who works in DC, works in in VA and in VACO.

28:39  
And one of their family members called and reached the crisis line and they were in crisis.

28:46  
And the employee that they spoke with was able to really assist them and and help them through that that difficult time and help them you know both in overcoming that situation but also having a better understanding of the VA processes.

29:05  
Would anyone like to share or anyone think of something that you do with your conversations that that helps you to to set that tone.

29:17  
And no, no wrong answers.

29:19  
George.

29:19  
Well, this is George George Mall.

29:22  
I work at the Office of Administrative Review and you know, I, during one of my V signal surveys call to a Veteran regarding his experience with the, you know, filing a higher level review claim.

29:35  
I found that he was living in his truck, you know, with his dog and then kind of it's like what you know.

29:43  
So that kind of kicked in.

29:45  
So you know, have you, you know, tried contacting VA for assistance.

29:49  
And then he told me the story that yes, he had reached out when he first became homeless and the VA, the homeless coordinator in in his area has set him up with the, I guess a room at the the the Domiciliary program.

30:06  
But when he showed up it was like, Nope, they wouldn't because he had a dog so they they wouldn't accept them, right.

30:14  
So he checked into a homeless shelter and lost his phone.

30:19  
Somebody stole his phone.

30:20  
So.

30:21  
So VA was not able to contact him to offer additional assistance until I called him, spoke to him, found out that, you know, he was living in his truck with his dog.

30:33  
So, OK, tell you what, let me, let me check on something and I'll call you back.

30:37  
And then so I reached out to the homeless coordinator for his area and they were like, yes, I remember that person, that Veteran.

30:47  
We've been trying to reach him.

30:48  
Oh, wow.

30:49  
So I was like, okay, you know, I just got in touch with them and I explained to him, hey, you know, he lost his phone and he had to wait till the end of the month when he got his VA check to to buy a new phone.

31:00  
So here's his new number.

31:02  
Please call him.

31:03  
He's expecting your call.

31:05  
And then I also followed it up with the e-mail, you know, just in case.

31:09  
And sure enough, they got in touch with them and they were able to find them, get them assistance through another VA program.

31:18  
Yeah.

31:19  
So I was able to help out on that and that kind of made my day and we were able to help a Veteran.

31:26  
I love that story because it wasn't just like you just heard that.

31:31  
You know I'm living in my truck with my dog and was like ohh, you know.

31:34  
Well, I hope things get better for you and you know moving on you you, you know said "Okay, hey right.

31:42  
Let's let's find out more about this". And then you

31:44  
asked

31:45  
Well have you talked to VA Yeah I've talked to VA but.

31:48  
And you didn't stop there Okay.

31:50  
Well, let's, you know, keep on going and you know, his story speaks to so many veterans that are experiencing homelessness and at risk issues like that.

32:02  
You know, not having a cell phone that really separates them from that lifeline of communication.

32:10  
It can remove a lot of even employment potential for individuals that are homeless and and looking to get jobs.

32:18  
You know, because first question on a a job application what's your phone number. You know so great job George.

32:28  
Anyone else want to share I love that story.

32:36  
You know we always hear you know the the bad news travels faster than good news.

32:40  
I try not to worry too much about that.

32:43  
I like to think about, gosh, I wonder how many veterans that spoke to who, how many Veterans that veteran spoke to after he spoke to you.

32:51  
Right.

32:52  
And he said, I talked to this guy George at VA and he helped me out so much and maybe that brings someone else to seek our assistance.

32:59  
I love that story.

33:04  
I think tone, right, just how we present ourselves can also set the stage for what is going to be expected.

33:14  
You know, in both ways, good or bad.

33:16  
Have you ever answered the phone?

33:18  
And the person on the other line is, you know, very despondent and not really really.

33:27  
It doesn't seem like they wanna talk to you.

33:29  
They say, hi gotta I need to ask you some questions, right.

33:34  
And and and you don't have that you know vibe of like ohh, this is gonna be a great conversation right.

33:41  
You can you can tell.

33:42  
OK.

33:43  
This is someone that maybe doesn't really wanna speak to me so use your tone, use your voice your active listening.

33:51  
Anyone else wanna add anything to that?

33:54  
Well this is George from OAR again.

33:56  
Usually when I'm you know when I call a Veteran up and the Veteran you know explain to him, hey, you know the purpose of the call is you know we're trying to get your feedback you know on this new appealed modernization process.

34:08  
You know find ways to improve.

34:10  
They're kind you know some veterans are you know another survey you know not very helpful.

34:16  
But then I would bring point out that hey, you know, by getting your feedback, you know, it's gonna help us to to try to improve the process for other veterans.

34:26  
You know, that's maybe going through the same thing, you know, So we're trying to learn from you so you can help other Veterans and that that has seemed to help me, you know, get you know a better participation for the Veteran because now all of a sudden they hear that ohh I'm, you know, my input is gonna help other Veterans.

34:46  
So I'm so glad that you said that because that's that's so true and especially with Veterans I find they are more apt to fight for someone else than they are apt to fight for themselves sometimes.

35:02  
And in saying you know, the data that you give me today helps me help more Veterans.

35:08  
Yeah, just and.

35:09  
And that means you're helping more Veterans.

35:13  
That's such a great statement.

35:14  
And and not to go back to the town hall the other day, but the Secretary even mentioned that in discussing how important it is to encourage Veterans to enroll in the different exposure registries, whether it be the Gulf War Exposure Registry or the Airborne Exposures or the Agent Orange Exposure Registry.

35:39  
Because that information, that data helps VA help more Veterans and that is I think so important.

35:48  
And and we forget that sometimes that the information that we're getting, the actions we're doing, they're not just for ourselves, they're not just for our supervisor.

35:56  
They're not just for a singular data report or statistical analysis, right.

36:02  
They are for the the greater good and the greater good of the Veterans we serve.

36:06  
Thank you, George.

36:07  
Yeah, I I just want to add, I want to 2nd that my name is Glenn Rush from OAR as well.

36:12  
I've also noticed that when you first talk to Veterans as you stated when when you said that you know tone is is very important that.

36:21  
But when you first call and just being upbeat and excited about what you're doing, has the Veteran get excited with you as well.

36:29  
So sometimes we say, hello, my name is Glenn.

36:32  
Russ, I'm calling.

36:32  
When you're upbeat and talking and you actually believe in what you do, the person on the other side of the phone gets that too.

36:39  
And a lot of them respond with me, respond to me by being upbeat and and happy as well.

36:45  
They're like, Oh yeah, hey, how are you doing and things like that.

36:49  
And they just that they're so more involved.

36:51  
And then I've also found out that afterwards, kind of like when I'm finished with the, you know, call, I kind of tell them, hey, like like George was saying how important this survey is and that we're actually helping and that we're actually trying to ascertain issues and problems.

37:06  
I've even with Veterans with some of the ideas that we've come up with because of the survey and gotten feedback on them like, oh, that is a good idea.

37:15  
But well, this survey is really doing things and thank you for actually coming up with ideas

37:19  
and you're not just not doing anything with this survey. You're actually getting together and coming up with ideas to mitigate those issues.

37:27  
So I've noticed that explaining that as well also helps them.

37:31  
Like as you're giving actually realworld practical ideas that you've come up with a survey that that also goes along with.

37:38  
Yeah, you know, it's just like we mentioned, you know, hurt people say hurt things and and hurt people, hurt people, excited people, excite people. You know, and if you're excited about it, you that is going to be contagious and they are going to feel that excitement in your voice and that engagement in your voice.

37:57  
And I used to have a a, a mentor that worked with me.

38:03  
And he said every time I call a veteran, I almost have to pretend like I am calling them.

38:09  
I work for the the lottery hotline.

38:12  
Like, how exciting would it be if your job was to call people and tell them they won $1,000,000 lottery, right.

38:19  
Like, I mean that would be so, so cool.

38:22  
I mean, you're not talking to anybody that's having a bad day when you're in that business line, right.

38:27  
And and it really does.

38:28  
It makes a difference when you say, you know.

38:31  
Good afternoon, Sir.

38:33  
I hope this is a good time for me to talk to you.

38:35  
Do you mind if I ask you a few questions?

38:38  
Good afternoon, ma'am.

38:39  
You recently responded in response to your appeal.

38:42  
I just have a few questions As opposed to.

38:46  
Yeah.

38:47  
Let me see.

38:47  
What is your name?

38:48  
Ohh.

38:48  
Yeah.

38:50  
Mr.

38:50  
Rush.

38:51  
Yeah.

38:51  
So I just have a few questions.

38:52  
Can you answer them, right? That is that's that's contagious, right.

38:57  
And it's really gonna make a difference in the level of engagement that you get from that Veteran.

39:02  
Great.

39:03  
Thank you so much for sharing team and that excited me.

39:07  
Your excitement got me excited.

39:08  
I love that we're gonna shift gears a little bit.

39:12  
We're gonna talk about a topic that is that is difficult to talk to talk about.

39:22  
Been researching Veteran suicide for a while and one thing that is really encouraging to me is that the numbers over the past several years are improving.

39:36  
So we are seeing a reduction in the numbers of Veteran self-harm where we we're commonly seeing those numbers of 22 a day.

39:47  
Now statistics and data is showing it's reduced now to about some some stats show as low as 17 some stats show around 19. Still too many and and a critical piece that VA has to show continued improvement in and on and and unfortunately something you know that that we

40:19  
have to be aware of as an agency is that the the studies and the information about self harm and specifically Veteran and military self harm.

40:30  
That data is only in the the very recent years, in the last decade or so becoming more available.

40:38  
You know, we recognize that Veteran self harm and Veteran suicide is higher than civilian self harm.

40:49  
We also recognize that a majority of Veterans that harm themselves are younger, between the ages of 18 to 34.

40:59  
I wanted to talk to you in this lesson about some additional statistics that I found were pretty surprising that I think that's important as we move forward as an agency and talking about veteran self harm and Veteran crisis, how we can address those issues and where we can look for opportunities and warning signs.

41:24  
In response to much of the data that came out in 20, 2015, VA has hired thousands more mental health positions and and are currently still on track to hire thousands more mental health position and physicians, psychiatrists, counselors.

41:46  
They've also created the role of the SPC, the suicide prevention coordinator and they are located at each VAMC and they serve to go out to the community and provide information about services that are available.

42:02  
We also are increasing communication amongst all of our VA social media channels.

42:07  
And just before coming into this training, I've received a a blip about a campaign that a Veteran reached out

42:18  
and in response to that he saw on social media and he was thinking about harming himself and saw a social media campaign that VA had put out and allowed him time to pause and stop and ask for help.

42:34  
So seeing that increased communication, whether it be on our YouTube channel or our Twitter, those have been a really great way that we're reaching out to the public. Increase communication on all of our different websites.

42:48  
Vets.

42:48  
Gov My Healthy Vet.

42:50  
Va Gov If you go to that website, you'll probably notice in the top right hand corner or the bottom right hand corner, wherever you are on the web page, there's a little pop up that will say, you know, are you in crisis?

43:01  
Do you need to speak to a crisis counselor now?

43:03  
And they can online chat with a veteran crisis counselor.

43:08  
Not here on the slide, but just recently

43:12  
in the past several months, we've had the national rollout of the 988 number and that 988 is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

43:22  
And for veterans, if they dialed 988, press 1.

43:26  
They will be transferred to the veteran crisis line so they can speak to a crisis support counselor that is equipped to discuss veterans specific issues.

43:41  
And with all of the increase in communication and resources that are available, one thing that you know we're looking at is and I think this comes to you know meeting the Veteran where they're at, understanding the the multiple realities that that we're seeing is we're seeing new data on Veterans suicide.

44:05  
I'm gonna skip ahead just a little bit, but what we're finding is that for Veterans and and we'll talk about risk factors and triggers here in a moment, we're gonna take a step back.

44:19  
But statistics are showing that is actually our nondeployed Veterans that are at a higher risk of self harm.

44:27  
And so having that bit of knowledge and also recognizing that Veterans are at the greatest risk of self harm within three years of leaving active duty service.

44:42  
And there are some things that have come out in the most recent study and this is a 2021 study.

44:48  
And so a lot of the things that we're seeing that have come about this past year and that will be coming down the road in this next fiscal year are in response to that study, but recognizing what are some real life ways that we can address Veteran risk.

45:06  
So one thing that has come out of the study is the lethal means prevention goal.

45:17  
So what this is and and you may have heard about this, but this is a program that supplies gun locks to our VHA partners and so Veterans can come into the VHA and they can at no cost receive a a gun lock for their weapon.

45:36  
And there's a lot of great information and in the help sheet that I put into the chat line, I've included many of the links to these resources.

45:49  
But it was really kind of alarming to me.

45:52  
Or surprising, I guess it should say surprising.

45:55  
It was surprising to me to find that studies show that the timeline from an individual's ideation, to self harm, to the event is in most cases only about 25 minutes.

46:14  
And so because that is such a brief amount of time, implementing a safety like that gun lock can be a critical factor in giving that individual a moment to pause when they're in that ideation and not following through.

46:33  
With that plan help seeking assistance and something that you know George brought up earlier a lot of mileage is being achieved with the with the gun locks by simply impressing upon the Veteran.

46:52  
You know if they have children in the home or others in the home that could find the weapon, having that gun lock could provide a safety measure for their loved one, for that child, for that partner.

47:03  
And so we're we're really hopeful to see the, the data that comes from the program data is also showing that individuals that have a relationship with VA are less likely to commit self harm than individuals that have a relationship with VA.

47:23  
There's about 22 million Veterans living in the world right now and it's only about 9 million that receive benefits from VA and that's education, compensation, medical. if it's between 9 and 11, so it's it's pretty fair to say anywhere from about 40 to 60.

47:45  
So we'll meet in the middle, we'll say 50.

47:47  
About half of our Veterans are not currently in a relationship with VA. So half of our Veterans are at a higher risk of self harm than those that have a relationship with VA.

48:02  
When we look at some of the risk factors for Veterans self harm, they can be, you know, extremely, they can be very different, right?

48:13  
It could be a community factor, it could be an individual risk factor, it could be a familial risk factor.

48:20  
Individuals that have multiple risk factors may be at a higher risk for self harm than individuals that have very few or no risk factors.

48:30  
Individuals that are experiencing financial strain, illness, disability, injury, those can all also manifest in substance use disorders.

48:49  
Sleep disorders.

48:51  
Individuals may also have PTSD or chronic pain and living with that day in and day out can definitely increase and affect someone's likelihood to commit self harm.

49:09  
Some Veteran-specific risk factors that we think of are that exposure to the extreme stress deployments MST and TBI.

49:19  
But I do want us to you know be mindful and and and look at the the data that is showing that that many of our Veterans that do not have deployments are actually at a higher risk of self harm.

49:32  
And and DoD is also finding unfortunately right now it's about 10 times higher rate of military personnel that pass due to self harm as compared to in combat.

49:47  
It was about 7500 that passed in combat compared to 70,000 that passed due to self harm.

49:55  
So it's definitely we're at a critical point in both active duty and Veteran service that we need to look at this data, recognize these different risk factors and then address these risk factors.

50:11  
So the main risk factors that we have found in the in the most recent study are financial strain, housing, food insecurity, unemployment and legal issues.

50:23  
And I want us to hit on those and we're also going to talk about just briefly because I know our time is kind of running down.

50:28  
You know, how can we address these conversations?

50:31  
What what do we say when the veteran is in crisis?

50:35  
But I just briefly want to go through this help guide that we have for you.

50:40  
You know, please be aware if the Veteran has a claim that's pending and they expressed to you that they're in financial hardship, you can advise to them to send us copies of their foreclosure notice.

50:50  
Send us copies of their past due bills and we may be able to expedite that based on that financial hardship.

50:57  
Like George mentioned, you know, being aware of the different even housing programs.

51:02  
Linked here is information about specifically financial literacy and mortgage relief.

51:08  
So the VA home loan program, even if it's not a VA home loan, they may be able to help the Veteran with financial counseling or restructuring to stay in their home.

51:18  
So that's always a good resource and there's some additional programs that have been implemented in the past year or so to increase Veteran financial literacy.

51:29  
So talking about different programs, talking about budgeting, the financial literacy link, it goes to a VBA website.

51:36  
It's a pretty new program, but most, all of these websites are VBA.

51:40  
I think one of them is VHA.

51:42  
And then the housing.

51:44  
It talks about our HUD-VASH program and different programs that are available for homeless Veterans.

51:50  
If you're not in the VPN, you may not be able to get into some of these links, but you should be able to access all of the links through the VPN if it's not a KM article.

52:04  
SNAP nutrition services,

52:06  
so Veterans that are facing food insecurity.

52:09  
There's been some changes over the past several years to SNAP benefits in response to veteran food insecurity.

52:17  
Also know about the different employment benefits, IU and then resources to look for jobs for Veterans that are facing unemployment.

52:26  
Not that education is a risk factor, but keeping in the the same line of thought that Veterans that have relationships with us are less likely to commit self harm, that our Veterans know about the really important changes in education benefits like the Forever GI Bill and also being aware of programs like Chapter 36 education and career counseling.

52:51  
This is a really amazing program that can help that individual that just needs some one-on-one guidance to help map out their future and understand how education benefits can help them.

53:05  
A Quick Link for legal helps that links to the OGC page that's associated with VA and then some resources by state for different legal access, legal counsel, pro bono assistance and then these fact sheets.

53:19  
So I wanna look at this fact sheet right the start the conversation fact sheet.

53:30  
It doesn't wanna play nice with me, so let me pull it up over here and I'll bring it over.

53:35  
Yeah.

53:35  
Megan, you were saying that if you're VPN they won't work.

53:39  
I know they I'm on VPN.

53:40  
None of the links work for me right now.

53:43  
Okay.

53:43  
Let me check on that.

53:45  
They should work if you're on the VPN, there's only a couple that are KM links that if you... Did we lose Megan's audio?

54:10  
Hey, this is Jennifer.

54:11  
I'll just step in for a moment.

54:13  
I'm not sure what happened with Megan's audio, but she was saying that those links should work.

54:18  
If they're not, we can take a look at that and see why they're not.

54:23  
But she was also mentioning that some may be KM links.

54:27  
KM is our portal that we use in the contact centers and you have to have a certain permission to get into those.

54:37  
Yeah, none of them.

54:38  
I'm clicking them on them all actively on the VPN.

54:41  
None of the links are working.

54:42  
It could just be this copy of the document, but if you could maybe check out. Thank you for letting me know that I'll certainly take a look and see.

54:51  
We checked them earlier and we were able to. Not sure if there was something going on when the with the conversion to PDF here.

55:04  
All right.

55:04  
Can I add something to that?

55:05  
Yeah, absolutely.

55:07  
This is Jason Latona with the Specially Adapted Housing Program.

55:10  
And I'll just do a quick plug.

55:12  
VA has five different housing adaptation grants.

55:15  
So I know a lot of Veterans who are dealing with serious disabilities often get very depressed because they're not able to navigate their home and things like that.

55:22  
There are especially adapted housing grants through several different programs available, which is also another avenue

55:29  
we can consider adding here or putting links on.

55:33  
Oh, I love that.

55:33  
Thank you for sharing that Jason, and thank you for ad libbing while I was having my tech issues right.

55:43  
A great program in addition to SHA. Let me add it as a Word document team and let's see if that helps.

55:54  
Maybe instead of the PDF. Think we might have lost you again, Megan.

56:10  
So Megan was saying she's going to add it as a Word document.

56:16  
When we had it as a Word document, it was working.

56:18  
So again, might have been something in that conversion to PDF, but we will add that to the chat, make sure all that those links are working for you because the idea here is that when you are in that situation where you're talking with a veteran and they're expressing that some of these things might be going on, this would just be a quick reference for you to use to get you to some of those resources that might be beneficial for them and might help them.

56:48  
And thank you for adding that, Jason.

56:50  
We'll pull that up and sure see if we can incorporate that there.

56:54  
Yeah.

56:57  
I guess, Jennifer, that what's gonna be my question is if we could add some of that stuff that Jay just brought up because that would be very helpful I think.

57:09  
Yeah.

57:10  
So this looks like it's a fact sheet that he added the specially adapted housing program fact sheet.

57:16  
That's certainly one that we can link and we'll probably link it from the VA website if we can find it there.

57:23  
Just so that if it gets updated, then this resource will be updated as well.

57:32  
Fantastic.

57:34  
So Jennifer, I'm not sure if Megan had anything beyond that.

57:36  
I know we're close to time right now.

57:39  
Yeah, so we we are close to time.

57:42  
But there was still one more thing that we did want to just point out and this was the start the conversation.

57:52  
This is a kind of a guide on if you're having those difficult conversations, if someone is saying that they are in crisis, what you can do to actually start that conversation.

58:05  
So I'm going to put the link in here as well.

58:10  
This just kind of walks you through how to open that door.

58:14  
Some things that we want to keep in mind, some things that we can ask them because sometimes when we are in that conversation, we can one be caught off guard or maybe we are just unsure of exactly what to ask and how to ask it.

58:30  
And so it's saying, it's giving you some examples of some questions you could ask and then when you're responding to answers, some things that you could say and of course you can make these in your own words.

58:43  
And then it's got some reminders there about the crisis line.

58:46  
So just wanted to pop that in there because I think that's just kind of a short but also helpful brochure that can we, you know, you could keep that on your desktop or linked or just kind of study it a little bit and have some things in your pocket on what you could say if you have that situation.

59:05  
Thank you so much, Jennifer.

59:07  
Sure.

59:08  
All right.

59:09  
Any questions on that that sheet?

59:15  
I think that really does give us some some great tips and ideas of how to open that conversation.

59:26  
And I know that we're right at the top of time and so I don't wanna leave you without mentioning the VA Save training.

59:35  
The VA SAVE training is a really important piece of information that was put out by VHA several years ago, but using that acronym SAVE.

59:48  
So looking for the signs of suicidal thinking, being aware of triggers, being aware of those risk factors, asking questions.

59:56  
Like Jennifer said, you know it's so important to be able to ask those questions, recognize where the Veterans at.

1:00:03  
Validate their experience of showing that empathy.

1:00:06  
You've all gave some great examples and I want to thank you, George and Glenn and Jason for sharing your experience and examples that you have today because you really did provide a great viewpoint for the group of how important it is to validate the Veterans experience.

1:00:23  
Homelessness, housing issues, payment issues those all can increase someone's risk factors for engaging in self harm and then encouraging treatment and expediting getting help.

1:00:39  
We wanna just kind of close with if you do have a veteran that is at risk for suicide mentions in conversation something like you know I it doesn't matter it it I I don't have no one cares.

1:00:54  
I just wanna go to sleep.

1:00:55  
Never wake up.

1:00:56  
You know recognizing statements like that, not arguing limiting questions but allowing the veterans speak, remaining calm, being supportive.

1:01:07  
And I think that the start start the conversation has some really great tips and I like you know how it gives me some confidence of you know, I may not be an expert in mental health.

1:01:21  
I'm not as therapist.

1:01:22  
I'm not a psychologist, but giving some good conversation points.

1:01:26  
I've noticed you've been acting differently lately.

1:01:28  
Are you OK?

1:01:29  
I'm worried about you.

1:01:31  
And then some additional questions and and then letting them know with some responses.

1:01:37  
You know, it might not seem possible right now that things are gonna get better, but they will.

1:01:42  
You're not alone.

1:01:43  
I want you to know that I'm here for you.

1:01:45  
So using those encouraging statements really can go a long way.

1:01:49  
And I think that it is important this bottoms, you know, sentence.

1:01:52  
It's very important to talk to someone right away if you have thoughts of harming yourself, if you're recognizing that they're having thoughts of harming themselves, asking those questions, leading the individual to help.

1:02:07  
So we've talked about a lot these past two weeks.

1:02:12  
We've talked about how to be an assertive speaker, how to effectively manage a conversation, the six different stages of a conversation, making sure that we're prepared, making sure that we manage what we can within our own space.

1:02:26  
And then today discussing how to handle those difficult conversations.

1:02:31  
Being prepared, recognizing some of those contributing factors for veterans that are at risk of self harm and the resources that are available to us at VA, Please do take a moment to take the TMS survey.

1:02:46  
The second survey, the one that's highlighted, is the survey for today's credit hour, 4633902.

1:02:54  
If you didn't get a chance to take last week's survey, please take that survey as well.

1:02:58  
Let us know how we did.

1:02:59  
That helps us to tailor the information for you.

1:03:03  
We're really excited about the work that you're doing with the V Signal surveys and thank you for spending time with us today.

1:03:10  
Please reach out if you have any questions or if you want to add anything.

1:03:15  
I'll be on the line for a few more moment, few more moments in case anyone did have a question or wanted to add anything.

1:03:21  
But I do want to be respectful of your time and we are at the hour. Jason putting in some additional fact sheets for that SAH program and I think that is a great resource.

1:03:32  
SAH, the automobile grants for Veterans who are confined to their homes because they can't, you know, they don't have mobility, they have loss of use of their limbs.

1:03:42  
They may not be aware of the automobile grants, HISA the home improvement, structural adaptation.

1:03:47  
There's so many different programs that are available for our veterans that that we can help them throughout these difficult times, these difficult stages.

1:03:59  
But thank you, thank you again for your time.

1:04:01  
I hope you all have a great day and a wonderful weekend and we will see you all next time.

1:04:12  
Thanks, Megan.

1:04:13  
Thanks, Jennifer, for for continuing to support us through this stuff.

1:04:17  
We really appreciate you.

1:04:21  
Yes, thank you for having us.