SIMmersion's PeopleSim® Technology is Used to Create Virtual Role-Players That Act and Look Like Real People

Learning new conversational skills can require changing a lifetime of habits. Practice with realistic role-players can help teach better ways to communicate.

COLUMBIA, MD, UNITED STATES, September 3, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Conversational Skills Affect Our Lives

Conversations affect every aspect of our lives from our relationships to our careers. Since they are such an important part of daily living, we may assume that we are well practiced and know what to say. But who hasn't said something they regretted later or had a

Figure 1 Conversation Not Going as Intended

failed conversation and were uncertain about what went wrong? While we all make mistakes, sometimes conversational ones can have serious consequences.

> "
> When I developed the virtual role-player technology, my goal was to create characters that seemed like they were someone we were talking with in a virtual conversation."
>
> *Dale Olsen, Ph.D.*

That is particularly true when counseling someone who is suicidal or using drugs. Even statements that seem to be effective, such as ones made when talking with a friend, providing a workplace performance review, or interviewing for a job can have unexpected consequences.

How can we learn how our words affect others? First, we must understand communication principles. However, conversational skills cannot be built with just learning a set of principles; they require realistic practice. A few role-plays with a friend or colleague will rarely replicate real situations and, therefore, cannot be assumed to be

sufficient.

Training Value of Realistic Experiences

As reported "Realistic training is crucial for developing the necessary skills, muscle memory, and mental fortitude required in demanding situations. When training is true to life, it simulates the stressors individuals may encounter, allowing them to adapt and respond more effectively. This realism builds confidence, enhances decision-making abilities, and minimizes the risk of panic-induced errors." When learning conversational skills, realistic practice is particularly important. Virtual role-players now make it possible to get the required practice.

Figure 2 Skilled Actor Behaving Like a Real Person

Figure 3 Trainee Selecting a Prompt

Realistic Virtual Role-Player Requirements

To practice conversational skills, the learner can use a virtual role-player, but the role-player must:

1. Behave as a real person in an important conversation
2. Act realistically, showing appropriate emotions
3. Provide a variety of experiences
4. Provide for repeated practice
5. Provide comprehensive feedback
6. Be affordable

If these requirements are met, the practice would be realistic and effective.

Meeting the Realistic Virtual Role-Player's Development Requirements

Realistic virtual role-players can be created to meet these six requirements, but also must look and sound like real people. To do this SIMmersion® uses videos to represent the role-player. The other criteria are met using SIMmersion's PeopleSim® technology.

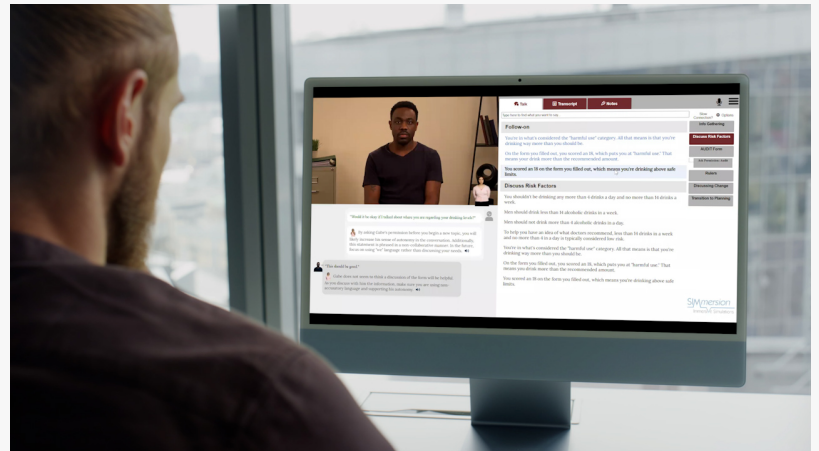1. Behave as a real person in an important conversation. To train a particular conversational

skill, SIMmersion works with a group of subject-matter experts who have years of experience conducting similar conversations and teaching others what they need to say in different situations. These experts know (a) how the role-player will often behave in different situations, (b) what novice learners will typically say, and (c) what should be said to the role-player.

2. Act realistically, showing appropriate emotions. SIMmersion auditions and hires professional actors to play the roles. Years of directing experience and supporting subject-matter experts ensure the performances capture the experiences seen in real conversations.

3. Provide a variety of experiences. Role-players are scripted with several different personalities. At the start of each conversation, a personality is selected. The role-player randomly selects a response to each user statement from a list of reasonable responses, based on the selected personality, the developing rapport/relationship and the history of the conversation.

4. Provide for repeated practice. Because of the very large number of possible role-player responses, no two conversations will be the same.

5. Provide comprehensive feedback. Without feedback the learner would not be able to have a foundation for learning. Statements that seem to be good could be disastrous, and the learner would not know. After each exchange, feedback on both the user's statement and the role-player's response are displayed. At the end of each conversation, comprehensive feedback is provided, offering an overall skill assessment on important elements of the conversation.

6. Be affordable. During the over two decades of developing virtual role-players, SIMmersion has developed a highly flexible authoring tool and processes that make the development of scripts and associated logic highly efficient. Software has also been developed to support the integration of the video into the training system.

Departures From SIMmersion's Role-Players and a Real Conversation

While SIMmersion's virtual role-players have many advantages over practice with real people, there are significant differences between them and real conversations. First, in a virtual role-play, mistakes do no harm and provide a learning experience. Second, in a virtual conversation, users must select from a rich list of prompts either by speaking them or clicking them. While the prompts make the conversation less like a real one, they make feedback possible and provide conversational models for the user, helping them to identify good and poor choices as the conversation progresses.

The prompts provide a wide variety of choices for the learner. They include ideal statements, typical beginner choices, and statements in between. To make prompt selection easy for the learner, they are organized into categories, with the choices learners will often want separated out and placed at the top of the list. This organization makes it easy for learners to navigate through the training and find what they want to say.

Conclusion

SIMmersion has successfully developed the technology and processes needed to create realistic role- players. Numerous scholarly articles have been published describing studies showing how effective the PeopleSim systems are at building conversational skills.

About SIMmersion

SIMmersion is dedicated to revolutionizing communication skills training by integrating realistic simulation experiences, interactive content, and comprehensive feedback. With a track record spanning over two decades, SIMmersion has developed numerous NIH-funded simulations that provide students with hands-on practice in scenarios encountered with real-life individuals. Backed by extensive research, these simulations consistently demonstrate their effectiveness in skill acquisition and retention. To learn more about this training, other SIMmersion products, and SIMmersion's PeopleSim® technology, please visit www.simmersion.com.

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