

Editor:

Ezra Griffith's biographical note<sup>1</sup> about Bob Phillips stirred some very old memories for me. At the very beginning of my career, I worked as a paraprofessional on the inpatient unit where Dr. Phillips served as chief resident. His sartorial splendor made an impression then, and it remains a vivid memory even now, 20 years later. But a more important impression was made by the way his physical presentation—his appearance and the way he used his face, voice—added to the success of what he said.

Specifically, I recall a weekend evening when the ward staff were trying with little success to maintain calm and control among a restive patient population. As the day wore on, it was apparent that our efforts were to no avail, and Dr. Phillips, who was on call, convened a special ward meeting. He asserted that the behavior that had been occurring that day would not be allowed to continue. What struck me at the time was that had I used the same words Dr. Phillips did, I believe they would have been perceived by the

patients as shrill and threatening. Coming from him, though, they came across as a simple statement of fact. And they had their effect: the patients went to bed that night on a calm unit. It wasn't so much *what* he said that evening that restored calm but *how* he said it.

Dr. Griffith, therefore, rightly points to the inadequately understood role of "performance" as a dimension of our professional competence. To those of us reared on television courtroom dramas—whether "Perry Mason" or "Law & Order"—performance may suggest theatricality. Dr. Phillips' example, however, suggests something both subtler and more profound. Perhaps it's related to the moral view of professional practice to which Dr. Griffith refers.

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#### References

1. Griffith EEH: Robert T. M. Phillips, MD, PhD: artistry in leadership. *J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 33:12–15, 2005