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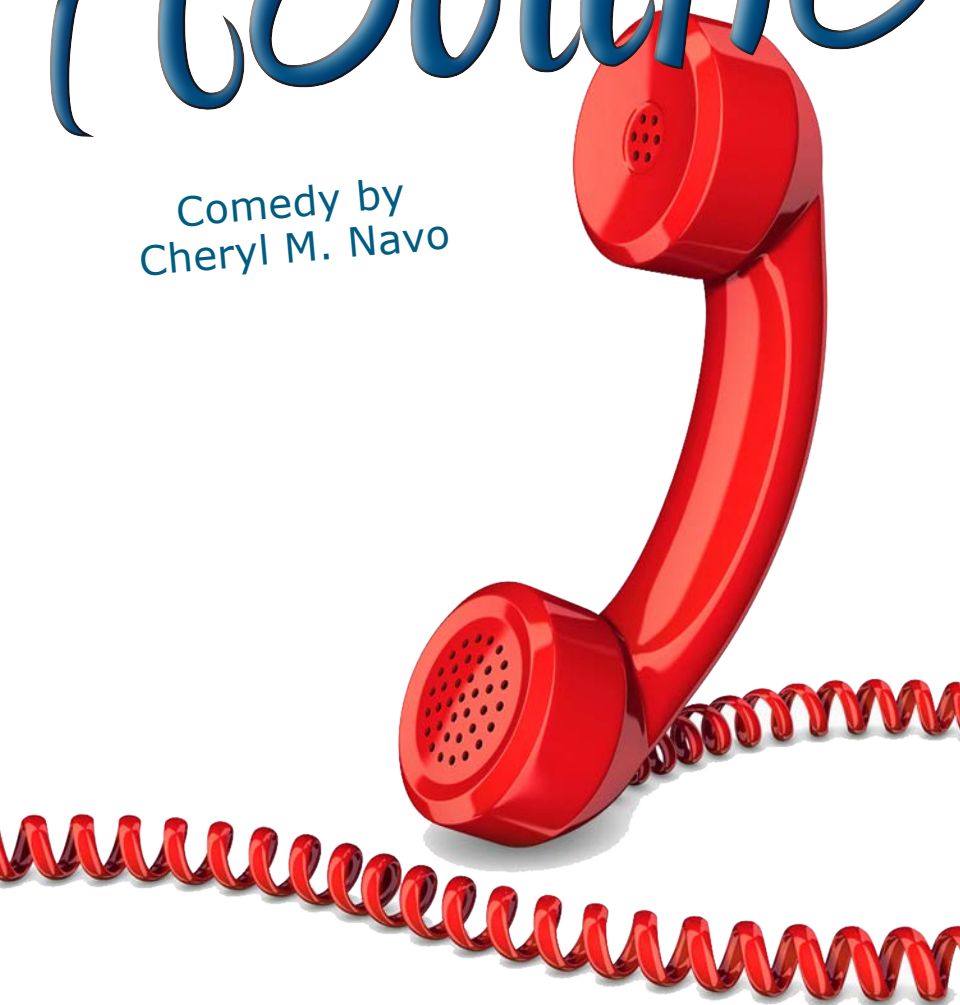
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Dramatic Publishing

Hotline

Comedy by
Cheryl M. Navo



Hotline



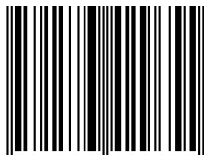
Comedy. By Cheryl M. Navo. 1m., 1w., 1 either gender. Operator 72 is training to be a counselor for the SILT (Socially Inappropriate Language Therapy) Hotline. This is where clients call to blow off steam by swearing at the counselor operators, using socially inappropriate language to release tension so they can calm down and solve their problems. After extensive study, on-the-job training and a verbal test, Operator 72 is ready to become a fully accredited SILT counselor by

facing his final challenge—a monitored solo call. While Supervisor 36 is away handling an interoffice dispute, a call comes in on Operator 72's line. Assuming this is the monitored call, Operator 72 tries his best to help the caller, Janine, "swear away" her problem. Janine definitely has a problem, and she just as definitely needs to blow off steam. But she is incapable of swearing. What can Operator 72 do? His attempts to help her include having her try rhyming, completing the sentence, and finally pretending to be the object of Janine's anger—her husband, Balaji. Janine eventually finds her own solution while Operator 72 learns that swearing might not be the cure-all the SILT Hotline touts. Although the play is focused on foul language as therapy, not a single swear word appears in the entire play, making it suitable for a variety of audiences.

Area staging. Approximate running time: 30 minutes. Code: HG3.

Front cover graphic: © koya979 - Fotolia.com. Back cover photo: Thoreau, NM—A Production Company at Off The Wall Theater, Pittsburgh, Pa., featuring (l-r) Joel Ambrose and Ayne Terciera. Photo: Lance-Eric Skapura. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

ISBN: 978-1-58342-965-5



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www.dramaticpublishing.com



Dramatic Publishing

311 Washington St.
Woodstock, IL 60098
ph: 800-448-7469



Printed on recycled paper

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Hotline

A play in one act by

CHERYL NAVO



Dramatic Publishing Company

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CHERYL NAVO

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(HOTLINE)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-965-5

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Hotline was produced in September 2013 by Thoreau, NM—A Production Company for the 2013 Pittsburgh New Works Festival at the Off the Wall Theatre in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Original Cast/Crew:

Supervisory Counselor 36..... Lisa Germ
Operator 72Joel Ambrose
Caller (Janine)..... Ayne Terciera
Stage Manager Alice McCallister
Facilitating Director Kathleen McKissock
Managing DirectorWendy L. Rea
DirectorLance-Eric Skapura

2013 Pittsburgh New Works Festival Donna Awards:

Winner, Outstanding Leading Actor: Joel Ambrose

Winner, Outstanding Leading Actress: Ayne Terciera

Nomination, Outstanding Production

Hotline was also produced in October 2013 by the Hilltop Theater in Baumholder, Germany for the 2013 Army Europe One Act Play Festival at the KMC Onstage Theater in Kaiserslautern, Germany.

Awards:

First Place, Best Original Script

Second Place, Best Supporting Actress

Third Place, Best Overall Technical

Hotline

CHARACTERS

OPERATOR 72: man, “nerdy,” office attire.

CALLER: woman named Janine, 20-40, dressed casually, nothing revealing.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36: man or woman, business suit.

SETTING

Split stage. L is a call center with a desk and a phone with headset. Vision and mission statement signs (content below) are posted. R is a living room with a chair, small table with a cordless phone and a couple of laundry baskets. Both the office and the living room are minimally decorated.

SIGNS

(Posted on office wall.)

VISION: To promote good mental health by providing a secure outlet for those in distress—to listen, support and encourage stress relief through the use of Socially Inappropriate Language Therapy (SILT).

MISSION: Promote Socially Inappropriate Language Therapy (SILT) as a primary method of:

- Improving quality of life
- Preventing physical and mental deterioration
- Combating stress and frustration

PROPERTIES

Large briefcase or bag

Three large energy drinks (Red Bull or similar)

Three pens (one is red)

Lidded jar containing one fish (goldfish, betta or fake)

Training Manual (with Dr. Fergus Guggenheim's photo on cover)

SILT Hotline Brochure

Hotline

AT RISE: Lights come up on L (empty office). R (living room) remains dark. SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36 and OPERATOR 72 enter the office together.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Operator 72, today is your big day. Your criminal record and background checks have come back clean. You have completed your on-the-job call training with our best counselors. One more hurdle and you'll become a fully accredited SILT Hotline counselor. Are you prepared for your examination?

OPERATOR 72. I believe so. I'm a little nervous.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. That's understandable. Remember, you can use your training material and any notes you've taken. We don't expect you to have all the SILT information memorized.

OPERATOR 72. That's a relief.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Let's get started with a review of some of the key points. First, a simple question, what is SILT?

OPERATOR 72. SILT stands for Socially Inappropriate Language Therapy. SILT was invented by Dr. Fergus Guggenheim whose years of research led him to conclude that subjects in stressful situations were able to lower their stress levels and deal with their problems more effectively when they used socially inappropriate language to release negative energy.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Very good.

OPERATOR 72. I'm a little embarrassed to admit it, but Dr. Guggenheim is my idol. I can't believe that I'm actually going to be able to use his methods to help people. I'm just

imagining all those callers out there who need my help. I can't wait to get started.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Operator 72, your enthusiasm is inspiring. Next question. What is the purpose of the SILT Hotline?

OPERATOR 72. The SILT Hotline offers telephonic listening support. Callers ... excuse me ... clients, call us when they are stressed. SILT counselors encourage clients to release tension by engaging in socially inappropriate language.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Excellent. What is your primary responsibility as a counselor?

OPERATOR 72. My responsibility is to encourage clients to use socially inappropriate language to vent their anger and frustration. As a counselor, I encourage the use of socially inappropriate language without actually using it myself.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Absolutely correct. And what happens if you use socially inappropriate language while counseling a client?

OPERATOR 72. Grounds for dismissal.

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Exactly. I don't think I can emphasize this too much. Clients can be very aggravating, as I'm sure you've noticed during your OJT sessions. But, we are professionals. We must not allow our own emotions to overcome us during the performance of our listening duty, even when facing what the layman would call excessive use of socially inappropriate language.

OPERATOR 72. Absolutely not. You can count on me, sir.
(*Or ma'am.*)

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Just one more question before we proceed to the practical portion of the exam. What is the SILT Hotline catch phrase?

OPERATOR 72. Swear away!

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36. Well, Operator 72, I can honestly say I have never examined a better prepared or more enthusiastic trainee. The next portion of the exam will be conducted through a monitored solo telephone conversation. Shall we get on with it?

(SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36's personal cellphone rings.)

SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36 *(cont'd, to OPERATOR 72)*. Excuse me. *(Into phone.)* Supervisory Counselor 36. *(Beat.)* Can it wait? I'm in the middle of—yes, of course, I'll be right there. *(Hangs up.)* Excuse me, Operator 72, I need to take care of a small crisis involving Operators 23 and 24. I'll return shortly.

OPERATOR 72. Yes, of course. I'll be right here.

(SUPERVISORY COUNSELOR 36 leaves. OPERATOR 72 opens his briefcase and unloads items in the following order: three energy drinks—arranges in order on desk, three pens—arranges in order on desk, one jar with a fish—removes lid. Lights come up on R (living room). CALLER, Janine, is holding a SILT brochure in one hand and the phone in the other. She dials the SILT Hotline number. The telephone on the office desk rings. OPERATOR 72 looks around for someone to answer. The phone continues to ring. Then it dawns on OPERATOR 72 that this is the next portion of the test. He puts on his headset and punches a button on the phone.)

OPERATOR 72 *(cont'd)*. SILT Hotline. Swear away!

CALLER. Ah, hi. Do I have the right number?

OPERATOR 72. This is the SILT Hotline. Socially Inappropriate Language Therapy. May I help you?

CALLER. This is Janine. I'm a ... I'm a first time caller.

OPERATOR 72. Hi, Janine. Swear away!

CALLER. Swear? You mean just start swearing? At you?

OPERATOR 72. You don't have to swear *at* me if it makes you feel uncomfortable. Swear at whatever you like—or don't like. (*Ha ha.*)

CALLER. And you just listen to me swear? Is that how it works?

OPERATOR 72. An accredited SILT counselor doesn't just listen. A SILT counselor offers encouragement and positive feedback, as well.

CALLER. So you encourage me to use foul language?

OPERATOR 72. That's what SILT is all about—the therapeutic use of socially inappropriate language to help you release tension and develop a more positive frame of mind.

CALLER. Does it work?

OPERATOR 72. Dr. Guggenheim's research is thoroughly documented. When subjects are allowed ... no, encouraged ... to express themselves using language that is normally frowned upon in polite society, the subjects gain a sense of freedom and control.

CALLER. I could use some of that.

OPERATOR 72. That's why you called, isn't it?

CALLER. To be honest, I didn't have any preconceived ideas of what this would involve. You see, I'm on edge—

OPERATOR 72. You're on a ledge? Don't jump! Ma'am, please don't jump!

CALLER. I'm not on a ledge. I'm on edge. I'm trying to make a decision on the best way to handle my situation.

OPERATOR 72. Are you stressed?

CALLER. Completely.

OPERATOR 72. Have you tried other methods of dealing with your stressful situation?

CALLER. Oh, yes. In fact, I picked up your brochure at my therapist's office. Sort of a last ditch effort before total desperation. Nothing's working.

OPERATOR 72. Desperation is not good. The SILT method has been used successfully in many situations such as yours—

CALLER. Which is why I decided to give it a try.

OPERATOR 72. Shall we get started then?

CALLER. The brochure isn't all that clear. Am I supposed to tell you what I'm angry about?

OPERATOR 72. Most people just call to swear.

CALLER. How would that solve my problem?

OPERATOR 72. SILT is not geared toward solving problems. The use of SILT allows you to relieve stress and calm down, so you can solve your problems yourself. Really, the main purpose of Socially Inappropriate Language Therapy is to give you the opportunity to blow off steam.

CALLER. I don't know if I have any steam to blow off. I'm really at more of a forest fire stage.

OPERATOR 72. Oh. Well, that's what I'm here for. To help you cool down. Drench the flames, so to speak. Swear away!

CALLER. But I'm not angry at you. I don't even know you.

OPERATOR 72. Ma'am, I know this is your first time. If it helps, pretend I'm the person you're angry with.

CALLER. That sounds reasonable. OK, I'll pretend you're Balaji. He's my husband.

OPERATOR 72. Good start. I'm Balaji. Swear away!

CALLER. Well, that's a problem. (*Beat.*) I don't swear.

OPERATOR 72. What do you mean you don't swear? Not at all?

CALLER. Goes back to my childhood. I was traumatized by an argument I witnessed as a toddler.

OPERATOR 72. Must have been some argument.

CALLER. I suppose. I don't remember it really. But, I guess it must have been pretty bad. Afterward, no one was allowed to use foul language in our home because I would panic and shut myself into the linen closet for hours.

OPERATOR 72. Must make it hard for you to function in the outside world.

CALLER. Oh, I'm over it now. Eight years of intensive therapy have enabled me to deal rationally with street language irresponsibly flung about like trash in the gutter.

OPERATOR 72. But, you, personally. You don't use any sort of socially inappropriate verbiage?

CALLER. I didn't say none. I say "darn" on the rare occasion. Somehow I don't think that's what you're looking for.

OPERATOR 72. Can't say that sounds very angry. You are angry though, right?

CALLER. I'm furious. I'm just not very good at expressing it.

OPERATOR 72. But you called a swear hotline.

CALLER. Only as a last resort. I am desperate.

OPERATOR 72. The whole reason we're here is so that you can call and swear, relieve your tension, and not take your anger out on your family and friends—

CALLER. I don't think there's any danger of me *swearing* at family and friends.

OPERATOR 72. I guess not. Still. The point of SILT is the swearing. If you don't swear, I'm not sure I'll be able to help you release your tension.

CALLER. Your brochure doesn't say you *have* to swear. I just don't think I can.

OPERATOR 72. If you don't mind, I'd like to refer to my training manual. I have it right here.

CALLER. Sure, go ahead.

OPERATOR 72. It's just that I haven't encountered this particular situation. (*Opens his book and runs his finger down the index.*) Let's see. (*Reading chapter titles—still talking into the phone.*) Courtesy in the face of extreme vulgarity ... no, that's not it. Confidentiality is king ... of course, but not helpful in this situation. Dealing with physical threats ... um, no. How to help the client calm down ... no, not that either. Dealing with interruptions ... no. Referring a caller for psychiatric evaluation ... probably not. The suicidal caller ... I certainly hope not. The crank caller exposed ... hmmm, don't think so. A comprehensive glossary of inappropriate language ... no, that won't help. Gee, I don't see anything here that addresses your situation.

CALLER. Does that mean you can't help me?

OPERATOR 72. No, no, no. I'm sure I can think of something. Not to be discouraging, but I feel the need to point out that this call is not free. You know that you're paying \$2.00 a minute to talk to a *swear* counselor, and not actually swear.

CALLER. Yes, I'm aware. I was hoping we could do this without the swearing part.

OPERATOR 72. Swearing is kind of central to the therapy—

CALLER. You're a *swear* counselor?

OPERATOR 72. That's what we call ourselves. We start out as operators, which is what I am, technically speaking.

CALLER. You're not a counselor?

OPERATOR 72. Not technically. Not until my accreditation is signed, which should be happening any time now. You see, operators have to go through intensive training in order to be fully accredited swear counselors. Today is actually my accreditation day. I'll be fully certified to listen to people swear at me.

CALLER. Wow. Congratulations, I guess. Sounds intense.