

Freedom Philosophy – Role of the Tutor

The role of a tutor presenting the Society's philosophy courses in a high security prison is at times scary, challenging, even a little frustrating in a constantly changing environment. Mostly though, it is one of the most satisfying and truly fulfilling roles we may ever be privileged to play in our lives.

When we step into a tutor's role and front up to people who have spent much of their days and lives locked up in a highly stressful environment, many coming from difficult and toxic backgrounds, we can understand if they have little tolerance for posturing, platitudes, or falsehoods. So, taking on the temporary role of the tutor is so much about just being our self, being real. When we are centred and calm, we can begin to meet the need and simply present the material. When we are non-judgemental, we can build the bridge of trust that is key to meeting the real person in front of us.

A primary role of the tutor is to present the course material in a way that helps the students to engage, question and understand it, and importantly, to encourage students to put the teachings and tools into practice in their everyday lives. To begin to become their best self.

Tutors need to participate in our training programme and develop a good understanding of the philosophy material to be presented. A tutor's knowledge is greatly enhanced if they can speak from experience, having themselves made efforts to put the same teachings into practice.

French philosopher Pierre Hadot offered us excellent advice when he advocated embracing Philosophy as a 'Way of Life'. Albert Einstein's guidance was even more direct, when he said that teaching from experience is not another option, it is the only option.

Every student is unique, as is every tutor. So, when chosen as a tutor, we need to follow the course material, but can feel free to bring our own style of tutoring. Before tutoring, prospective new tutors are invited to observe and assist for the first few weeks. That way they have plenty of time to adjust to the environment and the format until they feel ready to take on the tutoring role.

The Freedom Philosophy courses are well tried and tested and should be followed without any significant deviation. The aim here is to have a high degree of consistency across all prison groups. The tutor's feedback on the courses is also necessary and welcome, so that periodic updates may incorporate any necessary improvements.

Here below are a few useful tutoring principles we try to follow:

- Encourage students to attend, and be well prepared before the students arrive.
- The session starts the instant the first student arrives – with a warm friendly greeting.
- Follow the students – question / encourage their all-important on-topic conversation.
- We don't have all the answers – explore the material together and encourage students to consider and question the material to understand it better - and find their own answers.
- Listen carefully to the students, check so we are not answering the wrong question.
- The Socratic method is helpful – Be willing to be refuted / Listen / Question / Follow
- Encourage, encourage, encourage. Most students are not at all used to encouragement.
- Have fun, but always follow the prison rules, and be a worthy role model for our students.

If you might be interested in being a tutor or have more questions, email Rob – Chairman, or Jane – Secretary, at freedomphilosophynz@gmail.com and they will help you get the ball rolling.