How can the Advocacy Training and Development Program realise its potential to radically improve the standard of veterans’ advocacy?

The first step is to accept that veterans’ advocacy is an art, just as living is an art. If we want to learn how to advocate for veterans we must proceed in the same way we would have to proceed if we want to learn any other art, be it music, painting, carpentry, engineering, medicine, or architecture.

What are the necessary steps?

The process of learning an art can be divided into two parts: one, the mastery of the theory; the other, the mastery of the practice.

If I want to learn the art of medicine, I must first know the facts about the human body and disease. When I have all this theoretical knowledge, I am by no means competent in the art of medicine. I will master this art only after a great deal of practice. I become skilled.

I will have achieved competency only when my theoretical knowledge and skilled practice are blended into one. I apply my knowledge and skill intuitively to new cases, learning new knowledge and developing new skills in the process.

But, there is a third essential factor in becoming the master in my art – my attitude or approach to my art. I will never master my art until it is my ultimate concern. To attain mastery, when practising, nothing else in the world must be more important to me than my art.

This is as true for veterans’ advocacy as it is for music, medicine, carpentry or any other art. Whether a volunteer or paid advocate, when advocating, I must want to master every case. But I will achieve mastery only when I want to ensure the very best possible outcome for my client - at the very limits of legislation and policy.

The absence of this third factor explains why so few advocates and pension and welfare officers have, in the past, failed to reach their full potential. And, in so doing, they have failed to advance the founding principle of ‘mates helping mates’.

Many factors seem to have diverted energy from achieving mastery. But, not truly caring about the outcome for the client is the most insidious. The Advocacy Training and Development Program is therefore the long-needed spur to inculcating the need for mastery of the art of veterans’ advocacy.

Without a heart-felt desire for mastery by every advocate, ‘Mates helping Mates – Better’ will be as illusory in the 21st Century as ‘mates helping mates’ was in the 20th.
(Inspired by the writings Erich Fromm, 1900-1980; Social Psychologist and Humanist Philosopher.)