

The Goodness of Crisis Text Line and a Calling to Make It Better

Tim Reiersen¹

August 21, 2021 [Note: Page 17 updated November 6, 2021]

The author relates his personal experience beginning in April 2020 as a volunteer for Crisis Text Line, and why he believes the service is highly effective for persons in crisis. The abundant goodness of the organization is experienced as a sustained community of volunteers making their way every day around the clock, through deeply troubling, inspiring and rewarding circumstances. To provide a long-term foundation for growth of the service, there remains a calling to improve and reform the organization. To make it better, the author invites the community to consider how the principles of authentic human relationship might be applied to the non-profit's financial model and its use of crisis conversation data. The author raises ethical questions about current and past practices for consent, monetization, and commercial use of the data.

This is a work of personal opinion belonging to the author alone with absolutely no affiliation whatsoever to Crisis Text Line, Inc. or Loris.ai, Inc. The author created this work separately and independently from his service as a volunteer for Crisis Text Line and does not speak for the organization.

Crisis Text Line as Community

Introduction. Since its beginning in 2013, non-profit Crisis Text Line, Inc. has been making a growing contribution towards our society's emotional well-being. By texting HOME to 741741, anyone in emotional distress can seek help by connecting to the service and beginning a text conversation. The person who answers will help them try to calm themselves to a cooler state of mind. The service is free, available at all times. Many of these conversations begin with "I want to die" and end 60 minutes later with "Thank you for listening to me, I can go on now".

¹ The author is a licensed professional civil engineer in the state of Washington, USA.

Who is Answering? Volunteers, thousands of caring individuals, are answering the need to support persons experiencing crisis across the USA and farther, in an expanding reach to other countries that is just beginning. What is it that gives a volunteer the ability to help people who are in crisis, simply by exchanging text messages? Persons texting to the service may be panicked with difficulty breathing or may suffer so deeply from depression that thought and action take monumental effort. The messages that arrive reflect these realities. To prepare volunteers to respond effectively and grow their skills, initial training and ongoing development are required.

Training and Commitment. The organization provides training to volunteers in an on-line format that is moderated by experienced paid staff. Training is about 30 hours and can be completed in two weeks following the more intensive schedule, or six weeks at a slower pace, covering the same material. Volunteers commit to 200 hours of service during their first year. This is about four hours per week on shift, being in conversation with persons in crisis.

Calming Techniques. The service uses techniques known to the study of human behavior, such as empathetic listening, non-judgment, validation of feelings, and paraphrasing what the person has said to show understanding. The focus is on the person texting in, and their emotions in the moment. Volunteers are trained to use an ordered series of steps to guide each conversation through five stages: 1) establish rapport, 2) explore the situation, feelings, and assess risk, 3) help identify a focus, 4) help discover next steps and 5) bring the conversation to a close with validation and acknowledgement of the courage it took to reach out, promising to be here for them if needed in the future.

These techniques work exceptionally well, especially as the volunteer learns to express them in their own voice. Still, there is more the organization provides to strengthen its volunteer foundation. Consider the challenge of taking a volunteer such as myself, with no formal training in crisis response or the vast field of mental health, to equip them for the work and sustain them through the emotional pain that is carried off-shift. Consider that there have been over 35,000 volunteers trained over the years, with thousands currently active. The key to the staying power of Crisis Text Line is the community of volunteers and staff who are answering the calls, and the support they give one another.

The Volunteer-Staff Community of Support. Volunteers who venture on the platform, the secure computer interface where text conversations take place, are not alone. A supervisor is always available who can see the conversations as they are unfolding. Supervisors are trained to assess risk and step in or advise at any time. All volunteers on shift are listed within this interface with a number giving their experience level. There is an open chat among volunteers, supervisors, and specialists where anyone can ask a question, give an answer, and help and encourage one another. The platform has many other available toolboxes and vetted resources that the volunteer is trained to use. Off-platform, there is ongoing training plus an in-house social network where support and sharing continue in a more relaxed and reflective atmosphere. Volunteers teach one another. They become experts over time in the function they serve.

As volunteers, we share the privilege of being trained to use the tools created by Crisis Text Line, so those in crisis who reach out feel the touch of a caring human in that moment. Volunteers give and receive deeply, both from the community and persons in crisis. This is the heart of the goodness within Crisis Text Line.

Crisis Text Line as Corporation

Crisis Text Line, Inc. In our society an organization the size of Crisis Text Line typically uses a corporate structure to handle finances, paid staffing, decision-making, stability, and accountability.

Recent History. On June 12, 2020, Nancy Lublin was terminated as CEO of Crisis Text Line, Inc. This marked the beginning of an internal reform movement. Ms. Lublin was the 2013 co-founder and CEO of Crisis Text Line, Inc., along with its for-profit spinoff company Lorix.ai, Inc., formed in 2017. The 2020 firing was the culmination of efforts by current and former staff to put an end to discrimination, racism, and a toxic work culture² (Crisis Text Line, personal communication, June 12, 2020). The Crisis Text Line Board of Directors made an immediate public statement ([CTL, 2020](#)), communicated with its 35,000 trained volunteers (not all are currently active), and began taking actions to bring diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront. One area named within the scope of reforms included data. That is, the records of the crisis conversations, as texted or typed words, and all the associated data such as phone number.

² The website nancylublin.com (accessed 8/7/2021) states “Ms. Lublin was terminated from CTL in June 2020, amidst allegations of a hostile workplace. She later reached a settlement agreement with the organization.”

The ethical use of this data will be a focal point for the opinions expressed within the remainder of this paper.

The Role of Data as Integral to Mission. One of the co-founders of Crisis Text Line is a data scientist, which makes sense. Data science was essential to accomplishing the technological feat represented by secure, remote communications that include phone text messages. It seems clear the founders had an early vision not only to facilitate the conversations, but to store them digitally, and use them in beneficial ways. For example, the resulting conversation data, with personally identifiable information removed, could further help people by indicating trends and for research purposes in the study of mental health.

Use of Data as Described by Crisis Text Line, Inc. The organization has described its data philosophy in public sources and on its website.

From a public statement dated July 14, 2020: “We have always used data to help us improve our service to texters in crisis, and regularly have third parties advise and verify that our processes are informed by best practices. We are engaging additional third parties to further review our data practices to ensure that they are proper, private, secure and as rigorous as possible” ([Crisis Text Line, 2020, para. 13](#)).

The website details the following areas of safeguards and data philosophy for Crisis Text Line: a data ethics committee that provides advice, partnerships for data sharing, open data collaborations with researchers, and published research papers ([CTL, n.d.](#)).

The Crisis Text Line website answers the question “What is Loris.ai?” within a blog post dated March 12, 2018. The below quote is outdated due to a 2019 sale of some of the Loris.ai, Inc. shares, which removed Crisis Text Line, Inc.’s majority shareholder status.³ In spite of that change, the quote provides insight to how Crisis Text Line has historically framed the existence and purpose of Loris.ai, Inc.:

“...Loris.ai is a mission-driven social enterprise teaching people to have more empathy, cultural competency, and hard conversations. It turns what Crisis Text Line does best – empathy and innovation – into a means of keeping

³ The [2019 financial statement](#) available at the Crisis Text Line website says “The Organization uses the equity method to account for its investment in Loris.ai where it has significant influence, but not control. Ownership in Loris.ai does not exceed 50%”.

Crisis Text Line sustainable and free to users. We're leveraging our data-informed training to build a new training that will make companies more compassionate. Maybe it's a start-up cliché, but Loris.ai actually will make the world a better place.

Crisis Text Line is the majority shareholder in Loris.ai. We literally own it. (And we share a Founder/CEO – Nancy Lublin – so it's all in the family.)

Beyond its future impact on its corporate clients and the potential impact on Crisis Text Line's financial future, we foresee Loris.ai changing the not-for-profit space as a whole. We're modeling a new path to sustainability for not-for-profits. Simply put, why sell t-shirts when you can sell the thing your organization does best? ([CTL, 2018, para. 5-7](#))”

Further details about Loris.ai are available within the Crisis Text Line year-2017 financial statement:

“Effective January 12, 2018, CTL, Inc. acquired a 53% interest in Loris.ai, Inc. (“Loris AI”). Additionally, CTL, Inc. and Loris AI entered into a resource sharing agreement, which governs Loris AI's desire to retain CTL, Inc. to provide certain management resources and administrative and professional services.

In addition, on January 10, 2018, CTL, Inc. and Loris AI entered into a non-exclusive, non-transferable, non-sub-licensable, license agreement to use the CTL, Inc. materials for Loris AI's internal business operations. The license includes the right to modify and create derivative works of the CTL, Inc. materials, and governs limitations on Loris AI's access to CTL, Inc.'s training modules for use in developing their product. Loris AI will pay to CTL, Inc. an annual license fee of 1% of its net annual revenues in excess of \$2,000,000 earned by Loris AI during each fiscal year” ([Friedman LLP, 2018, p. 14](#)).

Subsequent financial statements through 2019 do not disclose whether the license agreement has been changed in any way since that time.

Use of Data as Described by Loris.ai, Inc. The following information is quoted from the Loris.ai, Inc. website.

“...Real-time coaching technology for customer support agents. Sacrifice nothing. Loris enables your teams to increase productivity, efficiency and the quality of their chat-based conversations. Example message ‘I completely understand how frustrated you’d be with the package not arriving on time. I’ll do my best to help you with this right away’...” ([Loris, n.d.](#)).

“No one knows hard conversations better ... A spin-off of Crisis Text Line, we’re the experts in handling the toughest conversations by text. We draw our empathy insights from the largest mental health data set in history — 150 million messages and growing. Now, we’ve baked all of that learning into enterprise software that helps companies boost their empathy and bottom line” ([Loris, n.d.](#)).

Corporate Finances

Data Monetization. Much of the information relating to monetization of anonymized data by Crisis Text Line is internal and not publicly available. From public sources and from information provided by the organization, as stated above, Crisis Text Line holds shares in for-profit Loris.ai, Inc., and therefore stands to receive income or loss associated with that venture. The 2019 financial statement reports Crisis Text Line as having total assets of \$39,415,758 of which the majority (\$25.6M) was held in investments. In 2016 Crisis Text Line received a major investment of \$23.8M, given as unrestricted donations. These generous donations were made by Reid Hoffman, Melinda Gates, the Ballmer Group and Omidyar Network ([Fried, 2016](#)). The Omidyar Network’s share in this round of funding was an unrestricted grant of \$5M ([Trujillo, 2016](#)).

Similar to the year 2016, the year-2018 and 2019 financial statements report sizeable totals of contributions and grants: \$25,036,660 in 2018 and \$17,111,205 in 2019. For the other years, contributions and grants have totaled \$700,000 (2014), \$4M (2015) and \$2.6M (2017). The author was unable to find any public announcement for major grants during 2018 and 2019, other than a May 2019 award from Google AI for an undisclosed share of \$25M that was divided among 20 recipients. ([Google, 2019, para. 3, 6](#)). Crisis Text Line accepts anonymous donations, as disclosed on its website ([CTL, 2021](#)), and so it seems likely that major donations during 2018 and 2019 were made anonymously.

Crisis Text Line has bills to pay with an 11,000 square foot office space located in the city of New York, plus support and training costs to create and maintain a volunteer service corps (a year-2019 annual cost of about \$2M), paid supervisors that manage volunteers and oversee crisis conversations (\$3.6M in 2019), engineering and technical support for the texting platform (\$3.6M in 2019), data scientists that collect, store, remove personal identifying information, and share statistical data, and develop metrics from texting activity and volunteer demographics (\$900,000 in 2019), and setting up partnerships outside the USA to expand globally (\$1.7M in 2019). ([CTL, 2020, p. 4](#)).

Loris.ai, Inc. launched its customer service software product recently and so may begin to generate revenue for Crisis Text Line. Crisis Text Line also receives payment in exchange for information it has gathered from its own evaluations of the conversation data, in arrangements referred to as partnerships. These could be local governments who wish to be alerted to trends in their community or other organizations including social media companies. The organization does not share all its donor or monetization sources and amounts publicly, but its partnerships with Google, Harry's, Youtube, TikTok, Facebook and numerous others are identified on its website ([CTL, n.d.](#)).

Clearly, Crisis Text Line has attracted the attention of entities who hold great wealth. The monetization of data is therefore a powerful force, and the data is seen as a valuable commodity.

Some Recent Corporate Actions Relating to Data

Crisis Text Line R&D. A promising development towards increased transparency is a dedicated online space called Crisis Text Line R&D. This appears to have begun around May 2021. The editor describes it as follows:

“As data scientists at a 24/7 text message crisis counseling service, we have felt the impact of a global mental health crisis in 2020 and 2021. There is a pressing need for more evidence to know who to reach out to, what methods work, and what solutions can scale in mental health service delivery. At Crisis Text Line, we are in a unique position to investigate these questions. We have an unparalleled corpus of mental health data at our hands—to date, 2.6 million people have started over 5.5 million conversations on our US platform and exchanged 178 million messages in the process. We wanted to learn from this data, and share it with other research teams whose work can

help make our texters' lives better. So we started Crisis Text Line R&D, an internal think tank, where our in-house researchers study this vast dataset, and collaborate with other research teams so that we can help more people in crisis. But research and evidence can only change lives if it is shared and told through stories—so we created this blog to share what we learn with you” ([Crisis Text Line R&D, n.d.](#)).

Crisis Text Line undertook additional reviews of its “data practices and crisis counselor training to increase cultural competence and decrease bias” ([CTL, 2021, para. 20](#)). The results of these reviews have not been made public as of this writing.

Questioning the Corporation

A Calling. The calling is this: to search and see whether the organization can do better. The search requires a safe place to ask questions, even hard questions. For example, there are basic ethical concerns which data audits are unlikely to include within their scope of review. This is a calling to reconsider some fundamentals of the organization.

Core Ethical Questions. I am raising questions about the organization’s ethical standards in two broad areas. One is consent for use of the data. The second is inclusiveness within the process to adopt the organization’s ethical standards in the first place. Before discussing these, I would like to develop a common understanding of some key concepts: ethics, code of ethics, transparency, and trust.

Ethics is the consideration of the whole of the effects of action or inaction on others.

Ethical Considerations. What is possible, and what will become possible in the realm of data science is already beyond human ability to comprehend. Consensus on ethical standards lags behind technological advances, but not for lack of trying to keep up. There is a rapidly growing body of work in data ethics. An accessible starting point is a lecture by Dr. Brent Mittelstadt of the Alan Turing Institute titled Introduction to Data Ethics ([Mittelstadt, 2017](#)). Regardless of the larger outside debate, Crisis Text Line can set its own higher ethical standards and follow them.

I do not have expertise as a data scientist in discussing data ethics. My approach is to make a basic human appeal for standards of conduct that give respect and show empathy to persons in crisis and the volunteers who support them. Ethics is a

multifaceted topic, but that doesn't mean it is too difficult for any person or organization to consider, ask questions, weigh, and decide.

An important outcome from stakeholder deliberations is a *code of ethics*. A code of ethics is a public expression of all the ethical standards that will be followed. Much thought and effort must be invested, but once it is adopted, the ethical foundation becomes firmly established and known to all.

To achieve high ethical standards, there must be *transparency*. Everything that can be open, should be open. Some things are reasonably kept closed. Everything else should be made available to the public. It follows that where transparency is lacking, those areas would naturally draw attention and questions. Full, honest answers generally satisfy a questioner if there is *trust*.

Trust is the belief that a person or organization will do as they say. Trust is reality-based. Trust is only achieved after time has gone by and experience has been gained. Trust can be broken, and it can be re-built. The founder and former CEO of Crisis Text Line, Inc., also a key player in creating for-profit Loris.ai, Inc. is relevant to the question of trust. To her credit, Nancy Lublin initiated and built access to crisis support over a text format, a remarkable achievement. It's safe to say, however, that trust was broken under her leadership. This break in trust affected individuals and the organization. When it comes to data, this is important to recognize.

Core Ethical Questions

Consent. There are different types of consent. Consent means giving and signifying one's agreement to some thing. Agreement means that everyone involved is agreeable to the thing, whatever it might be. Clearly, consent is required before conversations with people in crisis are used beyond the conversation itself.

If the conversations were not stored, there would be nothing to give further consent about. Crisis Text Line, however, has been storing the conversations, and using the data in various ways. The question about consent is this: what type of consent would be appropriate for Crisis Text Line to obtain for the storage and use of conversation data?

Human Relationships, Plain Consent. Within the conversations, Crisis Text Line volunteers use the human relationship meaning of the word “consent”, which I will call “plain consent”. Plain consent means that a person understands the entirety of what is being agreed or granted (no fine print). Plain consent means that “no” means no. Plain consent means that the people involved have a clear understanding of agreed-upon actions, at every step of the way, and consent is a continuous re-evaluation, a continuous open-ness to change from yes to no, from no to yes, with immediate effect. As volunteers, we learn about, and use the word consent in the context of sexual assault, of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. Volunteers learn about and use consent in the context of minors, children, and adults under guardianship. Volunteers learn about and use consent in the context of state of mind. The question that we ask ourselves, within the conversation, and more broadly within our lives, is: “Was this consent?” This meaning of the word consent, that we use as volunteers, is plain consent.

Legal Consent. Legal consent is of another type, and as individuals in society we may wonder: “Did I really agree to this?” The power of the legal authority over the individual can be overpowering. For a typical user agreement, legal consent options are: (1) closed door: leave now without the service or product you seek, or (2) open door: check a box stating that you have read and agree to all terms and receive the service. Even if you didn’t read the terms, the contract is enforceable against you if you signed it, you were competent at the time, and if you weren’t forced.

As individuals we all know this. If you’re using a product from Microsoft, Google, or Facebook you granted them legal consent. Legal consent, as invoked through user agreements, is real, and it serves a particular purpose. Primarily it is to protect the service provider’s interests.

State of Mind. When consent is requested of a person in crisis, care is due. Is the person capable of giving consent? What type of consent? Volunteers are trained to avoid asking too many questions in a row because it can feel like an interrogation. To be consistent with training, volunteers would not ask the person in crisis whether they read and understood the terms. How can anyone know whether a person texting in has given plain, informed consent to store and use their conversation?

Crisis Text Line Consent. In my opinion, the specific consent that has been obtained by Crisis Text Line for the entire historic conversation dataset is best categorized as meeting a “legal consent” standard. The legal consent is defined within the texting

service's Terms of Service & Privacy Policy (Terms of Service). The person texting in receives a preliminary message: "By continuing, you agree to the terms of use found here [link to complete Terms of Service]..." As the default, Crisis Text Line uses what I would term an automatic opt-in model for consent to data storage and use.

An alternative would be automatic opt-out. To request plain consent, a direct question prior to the conversation beginning could be used, such as "Optional: check this box to give Crisis Text Line your permission to store the conversation and analyze it using data science. We will abide by the code of ethics linked here". Clearly though, the service should minimize thresholds for entering the conversation. That is the moment when the person is most vulnerable, least able to read, understand, and cope. Plain consent for use of a conversation as data is difficult to obtain, but that does nothing to lessen the importance of having it. Anonymizing the data does not remove the need for consent.

Information about use of data and consent is available, but I found it difficult to locate and understand. A clear example: the text command "LOOFAH". A person texting in can use this command at any time to request that the conversation be purged. This information is found nearly halfway through the Terms of Service. By any measure, it is hidden. Instead, the command should be offered at entry to the service, and the command should be easy to remember, such as "ERASE" or "NODATA".

The organization was slow to mention Loris.ai specifically by name within its Terms of Service. It did not appear until the September 3, 2020 update. Crisis Text Line knew that it intended to use conversation data for Loris.ai, Inc. at the time the for-profit corporation was created in 2017.

Beginning in 2018, the Terms of Service moved general notice about use of data closer to the beginning, which would inform a reader that information is collected. "These Terms govern your access and use of the Services, describe what information we collect through the Services, and explain how we use, transfer, and store that information. These Terms will inform you if and to whom we disclose any of that information, and what choices you have in how we use that information... If you don't agree to these Terms, you may not use the Services" ([CTL, 2021, para. 3](#)).

It is also noted that the Terms of Service have been updated many times over the years and they seem to have improved in readability and relative clarity of

disclosure about the storage and use of data. Previous versions of the Terms of Service can be obtained from the internet archive ([Internet Archive, n.d.](#)).

Even with such language, to my understanding Crisis Text Line has not yet been granted plain consent for its storage and use of conversations. Persons using the service have never had any reasonable way of knowing that their conversation would become data and monetized. The volunteers, to my knowledge, have never been asked to consent to the Terms of Service. Volunteers agree to a code of conduct. They do not have opportunity to give plain consent to the use of anonymized conversation data for other purposes. Clear instructions for opting out of data capture (LOOFAH), and clear information about data monetization are difficult to find, especially considering the context. The context is that consent is being requested in the crisis moment by a crisis service.

There are two parties to every conversation: a person in crisis, and a volunteer. Together they make the conversation, they make the data. Neither party has given, or had the opportunity to give, plain consent.

The organization's monetization model is based on legal consent. It does not meet the higher ethical standard of plain consent. Plain consent is the standard within the volunteer community, and that community is intimately connected with the persons in crisis using the service. Persons in crisis are entitled to a higher standard.

Crisis Text Line – Affected Parties. In addition to consent, a second area of concern is whether affected parties have been included in the discussion. It should be a fundamental principle when the subject matter is personally sensitive information, that stakeholders be involved in establishing ethical standards. This applies to the data collected. This includes such things as privacy, consent, and the scope of research and use of data. For example, will study of the anonymized data be allowed for non-health related application to the field of AI, such as deep learning, natural language processing, text mining, and generation of artificial text; or will the data be strictly limited to study for mental health applications to human beings? This type of questioning could inform creation of a code of ethics for conversation data. To my knowledge, this has never been done by the community. The organization has self-imposed limits that it follows, but they are not fully public to my knowledge.

There is a risk that will be felt by the organization by the mere posing of this idea as a question. It is predictable there will be resistance to the idea because of the potential changes it could bring. This can be better understood knowing something about the dynamics of organizations.

Organization as Persona. The organization expressed to me that it has contracts with Loris.ai and those must be maintained. The organization expressed to me that the Crisis Text Line, Inc. Articles of Incorporation contain the principles of its existence, the scope of its operations, and mandates for its operations, and that includes the financial model.

From the organization's perspective, this is all true and proper. Organizations can be viewed as behavioral creatures. Some basic organizational behaviors include the tendencies to:

*Preserve the organization, and in doing so
Amplify information that is perceived as favorable to the organization, and
Filter out information that is perceived as unfavorable to the organization.*

An organization's behaviors will tend to be predictable within this framework, and will tend towards systemic self-deception ([Bella, 1987](#)). There is nothing inherently wrong with an organization preserving itself. What is wrong, is assuming that change is not possible. Humans can intervene and decide to change an organization. Articles of Incorporation can be amended. Contracts which have been properly drawn have termination clauses.

When one organization (Crisis Text Line, Inc.) creates another (Loris.ai, Inc.), it has absolute and full control to draw a contract that gives itself a highly favorable termination clause. If no such favorable termination clause exists, then one is left to speculate why. One reason could be that investors naturally want long-term assurances of stability. The more unbreakable the contract, the more investment would be attracted to the financial vehicle that was created, Loris.ai, Inc. A contract could be made "unbreakable" by including significant financial penalties, which would never make sense for a non-profit to pay. I can only speculate because the organizations have not shared the contracts. There may be reasons for that, but those on the outside are not without tools of measurement. Outside observers measure transparency by what the organization voluntarily shares as compared to what it is required to share.

Again, the organization would naturally say (my paraphrase) “We must monetize our anonymized data because the contract requires it” and “we must monetize our data because our Articles of Incorporation say that is part of who we are”. It’s not that the organization must do these things. It is that the organization was intended from its founding to monetize data, and it used legal means, financial strategy, and public relations presentation to preserve and protect this center of financial value.

The question is not about whether all has been done properly within the organization. The financial statements are audited and comply with regulations. One must be impressed with all the care taken and effort made to run such an organization and finance it. Well done! The question I am raising is underneath all that, even separate from it. Is this the only way to finance the volunteer and staff community, to be there for people in crisis? The organization, if true to itself, will answer “yes, this is how we must do it”. If we think of an organization as a persona, with a behavior pattern, it can help us understand the whole of the situation in new ways, and open more opportunities to consider, as painful as that may be in some respects.

Two or One? There appear to be two Crisis Text Line organizations, within one. One, on the platform and in-house social network, in training, and on the public face; where volunteers use plain consent, encourage transparency, advocate for reform, and only recommend resources that are non-profit, free, low-cost or sliding scale and not privately-run or owned blogs or businesses ([CTL, n.d., para. 3, 4](#)). The other, within the financial realm, the business approach, and surrounding the data; where there is a reliance on legal consent, there is much less transparency, there is resistance to change, and where data is analyzed and monetized, including protection of vested interests in a for-profit corporation whose commercial product uses the data that the service creates.

Answering the Call

We have something valuable in our hands that deserves all our best care and attention, all the way through to a place of safety for the organization. This cautious care is especially needed during moments of deep questioning.

This is for now, and for the long-term future. Right now, the organization is poised to undergo significant growth in service. Is it not better to shore up the ethical foundation surrounding conversation data now, rather than later? For the future, I believe this deserves our attention now: the attractiveness to data science and

commercial applications of such a massive, controlled yet messy, immense collection of words relating to deep intensity of human experience, may prove irresistible. An ethical review with community involvement could consider whether more strict controls and limits are desired, as pre-emptive safety measures.

The obvious goodness of Crisis Text Line is the training of its volunteers, the support they receive and provide, and the community of support they have made both on platform and off, and out into the world with everyone they touch in life. This is an obvious place to begin, when looking for what Crisis Text Line can share with the world. Why not run an international school for training customer service representatives and anyone who wants to learn skills for effectively showing care?

Is it not backwards to send algorithms to reverse engineer conversations in search of what was effective? Why not share the teachings that informed the volunteers to guide the conversations in the first place? We already know the characteristics of empathetic listening and calming. Volunteers are on shift right now, caring for hurting people in this way.

The calling I am expressing is to reconsider the use and storage of conversation data, and to make an orderly transition away from data monetization models of financial security. There may be legitimate ways to use and store conversation data, but the ethical foundation to date is incomplete.

To accomplish this, the organization will need to change. The personnel within the organization now, and its advisors, can do this. They are caring and gifted people who go above and beyond for a common cause. Once the organization changes, then the people within it can further its new direction in amazing and beautiful ways.

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Personal Note. This volunteer work has challenged me, and I have grown as a person. I have a lot of gratitude for this organization, in its entirety. I was not aware of Loris.ai, Inc. until the firing of Nancy Lublin caused me to research the organization. Once I became aware of Loris.ai, questions came to me, and I naturally began looking for answers. The Crisis Text Line organization eventually took notice. A designated representative engaged me in conversation, and the person was speaking for the organization.

In a videoconference on July 15, 2021, I was asked to confirm my stated intentions, which I had shared more than once. These were to research, collect facts, and write an opinion paper calling for an extension of the 2020 reform initiatives towards diversity, equity, and inclusion to include conversation data, including questioning the ethical basis for the organization's monetization model, and with the further intention to share that paper with the volunteer community, corporate executives, corporate board members, the data ethics committee, and with staff. I was told that I was entitled to my own opinions and the organization was not telling me to change how I felt. I was told, however, that if I carried out my plan, it would be inconsistent with the fundamental mission and objectives of Crisis Text Line. Therefore, if I chose to proceed, I would be terminated as a volunteer.

Further, I was told that there could be unintended consequences if I were to proceed. What followed was a litany of potential unintended consequences that could occur due to my action: that my standing as a volunteer would color any message I have as more damaging because it could come across as insider information; that donors don't like drama and it could cause some donors to withhold funds, or dissuade donors from giving in the first place; that it could be disturbing to other volunteers; that the optics of an insider raising ethical concerns could damage the reputation of the organization and that paid staff may need to be let go for lack of funds. Next, that it could dissuade texters from using the service. The reasoning given was that the texter demographic is young. Young people, I was told, don't tend to read entire articles but might remember a social media post, or adverse press with a negative statement, and that could give enough of a vague negative association that they decide not to use the service, thinking "maybe I can't trust Crisis Text Line", or "I heard that volunteers don't trust them".

The organization told me these kinds of things can't be accepted coming from a volunteer. That I could cause harm. The organization told me if I don't feel that the alignment with Crisis Text Line is there, then I don't need to stay. To this last I replied, "I'm not going to quit".

After reflection, I came to see the hurtful message to me as an indicator of truth. It proved to me, beyond doubt, that there are in fact two organizations within the one. The calling for reform is to make them one. One that stands free from financial motivations in connection with conversation data. One that stands firmly with persons in crisis. One that practices empathy in every aspect of its being.

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⁴ November 6, 2021 update: Sometime between August 21, 2021 and October 30, 2021 the Loris.ai website underwent a major revision. The links for references 6 and 7 above are updated to match the August 21, 2021 cited Loris.ai web pages. The content from these pages is no longer at Loris.ai but is stored at the Internet Archive.

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