

Have you ever noticed how arguments get louder and louder? Arguments get louder because each side thinks the other side isn't listening. Many conflicts escalate because neither side is willing to really listen. If you find yourself in an argument and you would like to do something to help resolve the conflict in a constructive way, try listening and letting the other person know that you heard them by summarizing their concerns and feelings. If you do this because you want to manipulate them it will probably have a disastrous result. If you do this because you want to find a constructive resolution for both of you, you will very likely receive a constructive response in return.

After a recent training a participant told me how listening had worked for her.

"In the past there has been much dishonesty regarding what happens when my daughter is with her dad, my ex-husband. She will tell me one thing and he another, I challenge him and he denies it, we argue. I end up not wanting to discuss anything with him."

"What I did this last weekend, after the training, was instead of accusing him of being dishonest, I asked him to tell me what happened. I listened and restated what he had said and asked him if that was correct. He said it was, and then I shared my concerns which I did with constructive language. He ended up apologizing for what had taken place (no denial for the first time in three years) and said he shared my concerns, he had never thought about them before. I thanked him for listening and said I felt good about our conversation and resolution. He agreed."

Our story this month again illustrates the impact of listening.

Ken Braun, the VORP mediator sharing the story, is a student at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, and served this fall as a student intern with VORP. Some names and details have been changed in the story to protect identities.

"The referral said Robert had broken a window, entered a building under construction, and moved a number of things with the apparent intent to steal them. Nothing was actually taken. The referral said Robert should be responsible for the cost of the window.

...he was interested in making things right with the victim.

I met first with Robert and his mother. We discussed the purpose and process of VORP and then I asked him to describe the incident. Robert said that he and some friends found the window already broken and that they entered the building just to fool

around. He admitted that doing so was wrong and he was interested in making things right with the victim.

I met with the victim Pete. I explained the VORP process and he was also very willing to participate. When I asked him to describe the incident he took great care to help me understand all of the things that were involved, including the mess left by the process of trying to get finger prints. He said he was not as interested in recouping all of the monetary losses for himself as he was in participating for the lesson Robert might learn through the process. Being a Seminary student I could understand his desire to do a little "preaching" but he agreed to follow the VORP process.

The joint meeting was held at Robert's home. After introductions we began the meeting with all parties

VORP GATHERING PLANNED

On April 11, 1991 we will be gathering to celebrate the work of VORP. Our guest speaker will be Dr. David Augsburg. He is currently a Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of 20 books on the subject of Pastoral Counseling, Marriage, Conflict, and Human Relations. Two of his most widely published books are *CARING ENOUGH TO CONFRONT* and *THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS*. His feature articles have appeared in over 100 periodicals. In our participatory tradition, we will again have a potluck meal. Call Elaine or Beth at 291-1120 to make your reservations.

agreeing to work positively at resolving this issue. I asked Robert to begin by describing the events of the offense. This he did including the statement that he did not break the window to gain entry and that it was wrong to have entered the building. I then invited Pete to share how he had experienced the event. He cooperated with the process and kept his comments to describing how he experienced and felt about the incident. He explained some of the consequences that he experienced as a result of the break-in. As Robert summarized what Pete was saying, he seemed to be gaining new insights into how his actions had impacted many people besides Pete.

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We then began to explore what it would take to restore equity between Pete and Robert. Pete's out of pocket expenses for the window and a mirror that had been broken during the "fooling around" totaled \$100. Robert accepted responsibility for this

amount and acknowledged the fact that Pete could have asked for more damages. Robert was willing to pay but didn't have a job. One option we discussed was having Robert pay it back at \$5.00 per month. We recognized this would take a long time. We looked for other ideas and one that emerged was that Pete might allow Robert to do some cleaning at a job site. I suggested that this be reimbursed at the rate of minimum wage. Pete said that if Robert was willing to work hard, he would pay him \$10.00 per hour. Robert and Pete agreed that Robert would work 10 hours doing clean-up work for Pete. In exchange for this work Pete would free Robert of all debt to him and upon fulfillment of this arrangement would write a letter to the VORP office.

This was a super experience for me and for both of the participants! Pete was able to have Robert hear his concerns and things were made right with him. Robert was able to express his concerns, accept responsibility for his actions, and make things right with Pete. As the meeting concluded, Pete even offered that if Robert was a good worker, maybe he could do some other work for Pete. It was incredible to observe these two individuals change from adversaries to cooperating with each other."

Thanks Ken!! "Blessed are the Peacemakers..."

VORP MEDIATOR TRAINING SCHEDULED

The next VORP mediator training is March 5 and 12 from 6-10pm. The training consists of the classroom instruction, reading the VORP Handbook, and participation in one case. The materials fee is \$7.50 for everyone who takes the training. All are welcome. All who attend the training will be invited to take cases. For those who don't take cases we suggest a \$75.00 donation. We will offer scholarships to help with the \$75.00 cost.

Thank you for your support!

Please remember that VORP relies entirely on your contributions to pay our staff and expenses to provide this service to victims and offenders. Your regular monthly contribution keeps us going and reminds us that you care. Thanks

Shalom,

Ron Claassen.

Ron & Roxanne Claassen
3075 N. Bethel
Sanger, CA 93657

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