

Ideas for Effective Protest

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If you have been involved in restorative justice work for any length of time you have probably been involved in some type of heated discussion about it. It might have been a debate, a letter to the editor, or just a talk with a person in line at the grocery store. Through each of these interactions there's a real opportunity to get your point across to the listener, but there are some ways that are a little more effective than others.

While this article isn't exhaustive I've listed a few things that we need to keep in mind. If we all follow these ideas when we take a stand, our time spent speaking will be more beneficial to the cause.

Go Native

Anthropologists often use the phrase, "going native," to explain why they dress and live like the groups they are studying. These scientists have found that this makes their work easier. People are more likely to respect what is being said by people who resemble them. If you are trying to get the benefits of reentry circles across to a juvenile court administrator and you are wearing a tie-dyed shirt, you may not be taken seriously.

Youth are Sometimes Disregarded

While the work is vast and requires people of all ages, we have to be realistic as to where these different age groups can be most effectively used. A middle-aged judge is probably going to listen to a man or woman his/her own age quicker than someone who is in college or high school.

Excessive Symbolism is Dangerous

There is much value in ritual, but we need to be aware that too much symbolism, which often accompanies rituals, can cause confusion. With prior explanation of the symbolic act, the act becomes easier to understand. The problem we run into is that

there is often little chance to make this explanation. If you are involved in some action to highlight an issue within restorative justice and someone sees it without this prior information, they might leave with the wrong conclusion.

Don't Be Offensive

Regardless of the listener's response to what you are saying to them, always keep a cool head. Many people do not have access to the facts and figures that you might. Resist the urge to become hostile. Be nice and remember, you will always get more bees with honey.

Know Your Facts: Be an Informed Advocate

Know your facts. You should never try to speak to someone about something you are not informed about. This doesn't mean that you have to be an expert, but you should at least be able to refute false claims that might be spoken to you about justice issues.

Make Sure the Time is Right

In addition to knowing the facts, we need to be strategic about when we highlight a certain piece of information. When some issue surrounding restorative justice receives some publicity in the paper or on TV, we need to be ready to react.

Be Clear

Sometimes we have an extended amount of time to lay out the entire argument for the implementation of restorative justice. Other times we may just have a few moments. We need to develop a clear and concise explanation that we can give to those who ask us about it.

Human Interest Angle

Remember that the men, women and children who are interacting daily with the justice system around the world have a special story. They are someone's children; they are someone's brother or sister. We need to make sure that in the midst of our

discussions with people that we make sure that they realize that these people may have committed an offense but they are not so different than you or I.

Be Professional

If restorative justice is to be taken seriously and be seen as an alternative to the current system we need to handle ourselves in a professional manner. Zeal can sometimes be misinterpreted as aggression. Try and disconnect from the issue while you are speaking about it. Always remember that not everyone we talk to, regardless of how well we lay out the facts will convert.

You have taken the time to read this article so must have some interest in restorative justice. I am not writing this to convince you of anything apart from the development of appropriate and effective ways to talk about the issue. We have all asked ourselves if our ideas are even getting across to some people. As proponents of restorative justice we need to be smart about these times. We need to understand that there are better ways of getting our message out to people.