

Culture of Peace: Working on peacefully resolving differences

By Bob Morse / Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

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“When words are both true and kind, they can change the world.”

—The Buddha

It’s quite fitting that a culture of peace would develop in the same town where many community members have been influenced by the work of Marshall Rosenberg. Nonviolent Communication (NVC), founded by Rosenberg, teaches how to express needs and feelings in non-threatening ways, deepening emotional connections that pave the path to peaceful conflict-resolution.

The Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) and Nonviolent Communication share the intention to bring heart and compassion to conversations, decision-making, and organizations. Indeed, local NVC instructor Joanne Lescher calls her practice “Speaking From The Heart” and focuses on relationships close to the hearts of Ashlanders—couple partnerships, parent-teen dynamics, and co-worker strife.

Not unlike ACPC, Lescher is changing the world “one relationship at a time.” Intimate relationships can be a safe container to learn about oneself and grow as a duo.

Yet partners can become overwhelmed when sticky issues emerge. The inability to resolve these issues threatens their continued co-existence.

Lescher teaches how to listen from a place of curiosity in order to hear each other’s feelings, even if the parties don’t agree with one another. Effective listening helps people come to the realization that they share core values — such as love, freedom, integrity, peace.

Despite being united in values, partnerships become clouded by the diverse and, at times, conflictual ways that needs are met and values are lived out. NVC provides a framework in which misunderstandings can be disentangled and misinterpretations clarified. Listening with the heart shifts folks from judging another's actions to understanding another's intentions.

A culture of peace encourages mutual respect so that folks feel heard and empowered, seen and validated. Lescher recalls being in a workshop where five couples were seated when the man next to her rose, enraged, and ranted. Everyone stopped breathing. Inspiration, strengthened by her NVC skillset, led Lescher to speak out: "You sound really upset, and I hear how it is important to you to be visible in your relationship."

Lescher explained how she didn't argue with his anger, nor did she give advice or agree. "People confuse empathy with taking sides. I empathized with him as a fellow human and focused on what was lighting his fire."

Compassionate listening and speaking tame anger and violence. The enraged man, upon feeling seen, quieted, and the workshop proceeded.

Both NVC and a culture of peace recognize the inherent value of each person. Earlier in her career, Lescher worked with juvenile offenders. In her first class, surrounded by more than 20 youths with criminal records, Lescher felt fear shudder through her body as one solid, determined repeat offender boldly refused to do the mandatory writing assignment.

Yet when she acknowledged his frustration, the young man was able to focus his annoyance on having never been credited any of the three previous times he had completed this assigned task. Lescher heard his concern, followed his suggestion to locate his former homework, and released him from the assignment.

This one moment changed his life — as it did Lescher's. Having someone listen and treat him fairly was a first. He became a diligent student and served his community service as Lescher's class assistant. Lescher appreciated his ideas and validated his worth. "He collaborated with me, and we altered the curriculum to better reach young offenders."

Lescher has observed NVC's impact on her own life. She had been isolated from other NVC trainers while she followed the social mandate of competition to promote her own business. Now she gathers with other local NVC coaches to discuss instructional methods, examine misguided teaching moments, and collaborate on improving all of their classes.

Nonviolent Communication diminishes defensive and competitive barriers by accepting the existence of conflict, fostering collaboration, inviting vulnerability, and finding ways to meet everyone's needs.

Lescher reminds us that being open takes great courage, and "courage," whose root means "heart," is a cornerstone of a culture of peace.

Bob Morse is a peace ambassador for the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission and a writer. Learn more about Joanne Lescher and Nonviolent Communication at

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