

## SMALL WORDS—BIG DIFFERENCE!

by Ron Claassen

"And" or "but." Small words can make a huge difference!

Example: "Yes, I support your program, but...."

"Yes, I support your program, and...."

If you wanted support for your program, which would you rather hear?

Accurate communication is an essential part of Victim Offender Reconciliation and Restorative Justice. Accurate communication happens

when the intended meaning of the speaker ends up the same as the meaning received by the listener. Sometimes, a word as simple as "and" or "but" can substantially confuse or change the message.

Example: If your employer asked you to change a procedure you had been doing for years, which of the following would you prefer as the preface to the request to change?

1. "I think you have great skills, are a very efficient worker but...."
2. "I think you have great skills, are a very efficient worker and...."

My guess is that you would prefer #2. The reason is that as listeners we usually discount the value of what is said before the word "but" and we tend to remember only the part after the word "but." On the other hand, we usually remember, value, and carry along the preface if it is connected by the word "and."

In a VORP case, use of the word "but" or "and" can have a huge impact on the outcome. In a conversation between a mediator and a victim or offender it can make a big

difference on how valued and understood they might feel and whether they finally decided to participate in this process the mediator is asking them to consider.

Example: A VORP mediator talking with an offender might say:

1. "Having talked with you, I have really learned to appreciate you, but now it is time to talk about how to deal with your offense."

See 'It's a Small Word...', page 2

## VORP relies on YOU!

Please don't wait. VORP can only grow if financial support grows. If you aren't actively supporting VORP with volunteer time, prayer, or financial support, we are praying that you will begin this month.

The need is great!

## VORP helps neighbors rebuild relationship after burglary

by Carolyn Wilson  
with Ron Claassen

Our story this month is from Carolyn Wilson. She is a student at California State University, Fresno, and took this case as part of her mediation practicum course. Names and some details have been changed to protect identities.

After several cancellations we finally completed the individual meetings and were ready for the joint meeting. Those present were Roseanne (victim), Ms. Smith (parent of offenders), Jackie and John (offenders). Some others had been involved but were not referred.

The beginning of the meeting was filled with tension. There was very little eye contact except with me. I started the meeting by introducing each person present. Since in my individual meetings everyone had indicated they were affiliated with Christian Churches, I asked if it was

okay if I said a prayer. Everyone began to relax a bit.

I told them about VORP and reminded them that the meeting was about how to "make things right." We reviewed and agreed to the ground-rules and that each member would have time to speak and express themselves.

Roseanne, our victim, started. She was very emotional as she talked. She began to cry as she described her experience and concerns. As she talked, Ms. Smith, the offenders' mother began to cry intensely. Roseanne expressed her concerns and questioned why would these children burglarize her home when she had made them welcome and her children had played with them? They were good neighbors before this happened. She said that she didn't feel safe leaving her home now because she was afraid they would enter her home again. She

said that she didn't trust John and didn't want her son to have any contact with John because he would be a bad influence on him.

Ms. Smith was even more emotional. After Roseanne spoke, Ms. Smith said that she was devastated by her children's behavior. She said that she felt as though she was a failure as a parent. She questioned herself about what she had done wrong as a parent. After further discussion between the mothers, Ms. Smith said, "I'm sorry Roseanne, I'm truly sorry." As she talked Jackie, her daughter, began to cry.

Roseanne (victim) reached out to Jackie (offender) and they held hands and cried together. Jackie then began to tell Roseanne, from the very beginning, how the burglary started and what took place in her home. Jackie painted the picture step by step, telling what items were

See 'Victim, offender...', page 2

## Volunteer Mediators Needed!

VORP mediators learn and practice peacemaking skills they can use in the home, workplace, and congregation.

The next trainings are scheduled on September 12 & 13; September 18, 25 & October 2; and November 7 & 8.

Call 291-1120 for details.

# IT'S A SMALL WORD AFTER ALL...

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2. "Having talked with you, I have really learned to appreciate you, and now it is time to talk about how to deal with your offense."

The second one brings the appreciation along with the need to deal with the offense, whereas in the first one the appreciation part is negated by the word "but." I think that the offender is going to feel better about moving ahead with the mediator after hearing #2.

Example: If you are a VORP mediator and you are talking with a victim you might say:

1. "It sounds like you have been very hurt by the offense and are very angry but now I'm wondering if you'd like to think together about the possibility of how things could be made as right as possible with you."

2. "It sounds like you have been very hurt by the offense and are very angry and now I'm wondering if you'd like to think together about the possibility of how things could be made as right as possible with you."

The second one validates the experience of the victim and then connects those feelings to the possibility of working at making things right. The message is that the experience of hurt and anger are recognized and need to be dealt with in some way in order to make things as right as possible. The first gives the victim the message that the mediator would prefer leaving those feelings behind and now talk about making things right apart from these feelings. I think that the victim who hears the sec-

ond one will be more likely to be interested in working with the mediator in exploring the possibilities.

While it is very important for a mediator, boss, friend, or spouse, to understand the difference between the message sent when using "and" or "but," it is very important to also know that language alone will not carry the meaning. The most important part is the message that you honestly believe and want to con-

vey. Knowing that using "and" or "but" can significantly change how your message is understood, can be very useful in helping us communicate more accurately.

Of course, what we want to hear is: "Yes, I support VORP, and I will send a contribution to help make it possible for more victims and offenders to experience responsibility and reconciliation as a preferred option for responding to a crime."

## Victim, offender families begin reconciliation process after discussion of offense, apology

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taken, that they drank champagne and ate some food and took an angel and some other ornaments. After an extensive description and some discussion, Roseanne said she wasn't even aware of the things that Jackie mentioned had been taken. Then Roseanne started to laugh, they all started laughing. Roseanne asked Jackie, "Why would you take pajamas?" Jackie stated that some other girl wanted the pajamas.

Then they talked about how Roseanne came to suspect them. After discovering the burglary, she had gone to the Smith residence to tell them and ask if they saw anything suspicious. John told her that some big trucks had come to her house. She said after talking with them she felt as if he had lied and maybe they had burglarized her home.

John apologized to Roseanne again. He reassured her that this would never happen again. He also told her that he would keep a watchful eye on her home.

Roseanne seemed to appreciate this. John said he hoped that he could again, at some point, be trusted to be friends with Ms Smith's son. John said he really missed him. After further agreements about making things right between them and more apologies, there were more hugs and they became teary eyed once more. They stated they all felt the meeting was a success.

We ended the meeting. After I locked the office, they were all in the parking lot talking.

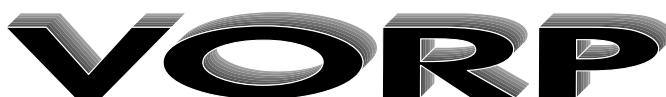
Blessed are the Peacemakers!!

Thanks Carolyn!

### **Carolyn's Reflection**

The whole experience was truly a learning experience for me. Everything I learned in the training was applied. Role plays gave me a good trial run, but the real experience took it to a level I hadn't expected. It's difficult to explain unless you have experienced it. I think it's because you can really see and feel the emotion and tension of everyone involved and how it changes throughout the meeting. I think that I got more out of it than they did. I asked for more cases.

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