

## ***AVOIDING VIOLENCE***

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AVP trains by means of workshops. These are practical and experiential rather than theoretical. They aim to show people how to find their own innate power to positively transform themselves so that they can work at transforming their own communities. home, school, workplace, etc.

So much for the theory. But what is an AVP workshop really like? My first experience was earlier this year in Cape Town, when a group of 15 came together at the Lutheran Centre, Athlone, at a basic workshop facilitated by Christoph Baumann and his team.

White, retired and English speaking, my partner and I became part of a group which included eight nationalities with three main mother tongues - English, French and Burundian.

This wholly experiential course was a sobering experience. Age did not necessarily confer wisdom. Group exercises designed to train you to "listen rather than hear" showed that I, as much as the youngest participant, only listened with half an ear, missing certain key directions and adding in my own preconceptions.

Other exercises showed our tendency to work for our own objectives rather than those best for the group. Brute strength might enable you to achieve an immediate end but did not foster the overall goal of the team. On a more pleasant note, we practiced affirming both our own and others positive traits.

Reeling from the AVP experience we tried a course on Non Violent Communication also facilitated by Christoph Bauman. This group was comfortably English speaking white and only eight strong. But the emotional ride got very bumpy at times.

NVC aims to facilitate: communication and resolve differences peacefully by helping identify shared values and needs and by avoiding language that contributes to resentment and lowers self esteem.

It sounds so easy but do you know the difference between feelings and needs? Easy - except what most of us call "feelings" are not really such and true "needs" are universal.

Again the group role play (experiential) experience came as a shock, revealing patterns of thinking and communicating that could have been designed to press sensitive "buttons" and contribute to resentment. The power of language is awesome.

If you attend an NVC course as a couple - beware. Either you will be accused of practicing NVC to achieve your own ends or - equally difficult - you will be asked why you use NVC techniques on everybody else except the one you love best. The A VP course also included sessions on communication, including NVC. My admiration for those struggling with this concept in their second or even third language grew as the course continued.

Apart from the basic AVP workshop there is an advanced workshop and then, for those selected, a train-the-trainer course. If you are willing to undertake these and then work on a voluntary basis, it will enable AVP to reach out to many more places where people are too poor to pay, such as schools and youth groups.

*"The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot overcome darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."*

***Martin Luther King***