

Calm Ambassadors in the Midst of an Angry Mob

The secret I use as I talk to those who disagree.

June 1, 2004

Dear Friends,

Years ago my friend Glen shared with me some advice I've never forgotten. In essence, he said, "When my wife and I have a disagreement, we think of ourselves not on opposing sides glaring angrily at each other, but as partners who turn to look at the problem together, standing shoulder to shoulder."

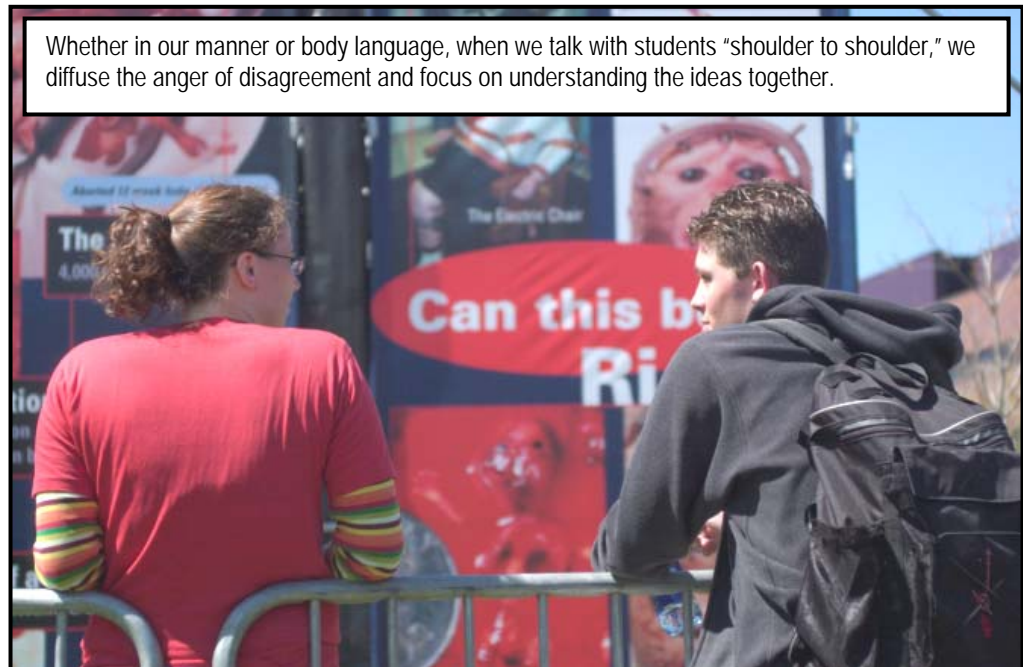
I have used this approach on campuses repeatedly to win over those who disagree with me. They are not the problem. Their position is, and if we can stand side-by-side, I have the greatest opportunity possible to change their minds and hearts.

I teach students and volunteers this approach when they are going to engage those who disagree. We picture ourselves as members of a community together looking at a problem we need to solve.

As we look at the problem with the people we want to win, one aspect of our attitude is critical. I love how my audiences react when I admit that *I* believe false things just like abortion advocates. Confusion is followed by Homer Simpson-esque looks of "Doh! Why didn't I think of that?" when I tell them "I believe false things—I just wish I knew what they were so I wouldn't believe them anymore!"

These are my most powerful tools when talking to angry students, whether alone or in a crowd. They undergird the whole enterprise. We can't confuse the person with the problem. And we can't ignore the fact that we, too, have blind spots and incorrect thinking and need someone to come alongside us to help us find the truth.

Let me show you how this played out in a recent conversation I had at the University of New Mexico.



In the last week of April, students at the University of New Mexico were frustrated with the Justice For All exhibit a student club had erected on campus that day. Partnering with the club, I took much of the heat for five straight hours as I talked with three separate crowds. One of those crowds included a homosexual student named Fred. Fred looked at me incredulously as I talked with other angry students. Then he stepped up to the plate.

He disagreed with the exhibit and my view of the unborn and he expressed his opinion in no uncertain terms. In my usual fashion I asked him questions, sometimes pointing back to the pictures of aborted fetuses to make sure everyone in the area, including Fred, realized exactly what choice he was advocating. As I listened, I began to understand Fred's main concern. I was not doing anything to make abortion unnecessary. He was thinking I should promote condoms and create different panels for the exhibit. I thanked him for this suggestion and pointed the conversation back to the unborn.

One of the ways I stand side-by-side with other people is to find places where we can agree. This builds confidence in them that I am not opposed to them—I am only concerned about finding true ideas. I'm not concerned about what "team" Fred is on. I simply want to work together to find what's true about abortion.

So when another student came in opposing Fred rather caustically, I took "Fred's side" and fielded some of the heat for him. I clarified his view to make sure it wasn't misunderstood. I affirmed the valid points Fred was making. I believe he appreciated my coming alongside him as we looked at the problem "shoulder to shoulder."

Later in the conversation, Fred returned the favor. When someone charged that the exhibit doesn't change minds and the dialogue is worthless, Fred said to me, "You changed my mind from being 'third trimester' to thinking 'life begins at conception.'" In a culture where we think it's paramount to save face, this could not have been easy to admit. Although Fred also said he remained pro-choice for pragmatic reasons, I was glad to hear this progress. Another student, Ted, came up and stated that a fetus is not a human being. This time it was Fred who questioned Ted and pointed out problems with some of Ted's arguments. Not only had I convinced Fred of the humanity of the unborn, but evidently I had passed on to him a whole new approach to dealing with difficult disagreements.

So you can see we're making progress. Your prayers and consistent financial partnership are enabling me to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with students, affirming their dignity while asking tough questions. These are great tools, and ones I encourage you to try.

Our work together enables the students we train to be effective ambassadors who exhibit an attractive humility as they win students to the pro-life view. One of these pro-life students, Matt, was especially affected by our time at the New Mexico exhibit. Next month, I'll share his exciting story with you.

For the Kingdom,

Stephen

Steve Wagner

Recent and Upcoming Activities

- 5/13 *Uncorking Moral Relativism* – Orange Coast College (Orange, CA)
- 5/20 *Human Rights and the Right to Choose* – Thursdays at the Library (North Hills, CA)
- 6/4 *The Million-Dollar Proposal* – Commencement Address, Christian Fellowship School (Denver, Colorado)
- 6/13 *Who's Waiting for You* – First Baptist Church of West Los Angeles (Westwood, CA)
- 6/26-27 *Making Abortion Unthinkable*, Speaker's Training, and church presentations – Arizona Right to Life (AZ)

Internet News:

Jonathan Block and Joanna Shrewsbury, members of the University of Missouri Justice For All Club I trained, were featured on the STR radio broadcast on May 30, 2004. These talented students give me great hope for the future of the pro-life movement. They'll do the same for you. The archived broadcast is available now on mp3. [Click here for STR Radio.](#)

Help Steve train pro-life students to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with those that disagree!
Click [here](#) to make a gift at online. Be sure to designate your gift for Steve Wagner (SW).