

# NOTES FROM CONVERSATION WITH BOB ROBERTS

RE ADHOC PROJECT, 27/ 01/ 12



*"My Souls Said to Me"*

Bob:

Very difficult to do CB with young people if they're not mandated to be there – they won't come.

How to introduce CB? If we say, we're here to build community, we've lost them already. What I found works really well, which I always say now, is, "What we're here to do is learn how to communicate effectively. What I mean by that is, when you speak, people stop what they're doing to listen to you. They want to know what you have to say. That can be very important in court! Like when the judge asks you a question. Here, you can learn how to speak so an entire room will listen to what you have to say. That could save years of your life. – Anyone here interested in learning this?"

Every hand goes up!

*Then* we're in a position to explain some ground rules. "Since you're interested, I'm going to give you some guidelines, on how you can speak so people listen. Then, if during the workshop you have sthg to say and you don't know how to say it, you can look on the wall."

[He puts all the guidelines up on the wall]

E.g. guideline 'be emotionally present' can be stated as "A really important part of being a good speaker is being a good listener. So even if you don't say much in this workshop at all, but you've listened well, you've helped everyone here and yourself!"

## Mentoring:

The most important role of a mentor (which is what we will be) is to praise them. They likely never get praised – especially not from an older generation! Maybe from the gang leader, but from an older person it means so much more.

E.g. if at the end of the day, the group feels different – ask them! “Does this group feel different to you than it did this morning? Well, *you* did that! Well done!” Repeat that every day, or as often as you feel like saying it.

[But Bob doesn’t praise individuals]

If they seek advice from me, I always say, “I’m not in a position to give you advice – I am just as lost as you are, the only diff is that I’ve been lost a bit longer. All I can do is share with you ways I’ve been lost, or found my way, and I’m really happy to do that. But the good news is that if you search deep enough inside you, you’ll find your answers there, because you have all the genius you need already inside you.” [And we’re all here to listen to you as you go searching for the answers inside you. And we have all the patience in the world for this, because we have done it ourselves.]

Really important because everyone’s always giving them the answers, which means *no one is listening!*

It’s much better to listen and praise!

Mentors should always be at least ½ a generation older.

Remember – realness is never boring!

Remember also that adolescents are hard-wired to do what you want them to do here – to grieve the wounds of childhood! This will make your job easier, because they are at the natural age of initiation, but this will not be offered them anywhere today!

For getting everyone’s voice heard in the room, I never ask “Why are you here?” etc. I ask everyone to pledge to be non-violent and to not threaten violence in this workshop. They probably *want* this; it will help to create safety in the room.

Watch out for borderline psychiatric disorders – you cannot build community with them! [In Bob’s experience] – How to spot them: attention-seeking and splitting activities (they try to split the group, most often against the facilitators, and set themselves up as victims)

Wait and let them bring up our differences in gender, race, class, age – and **praise** them for being honest! “That was really courageous of you to bring that up, and I respect you for it. And it’s real. But we just happen to be the people who are here because we believe in this model; that it can help people find their way, and that’s why we want to share it with you.” [“I respect you for saying it respectfully” if they say it respectfully.]

It always starts out with distance, but on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day, they all want my email address, chat, etc.

We found that weekly groups was too often – found it was overkill – start out with that for maybe 2 weeks, then drop down to fortnightly.

Our work with the Juvenile Detention Centre (which is my favourite work – i.e. with juveniles) stopped 6 months ago; we are now looking for new funding.

When we speak again, I’d like to tell you about the entrepreneurial scheme in Milwaukee [Wisconsin?] – we educate the ex-convicts in business studies so they can start up their own business, whether that’s growing vegetables and selling them on a street corner, or whatever they feel they can do. And even if they ‘just’ get a job, the fact that they’ve done a business course means they have better employment prospects, they are more likely to get promoted to better positions, etc.

Bob works with an ex-convict called Dennis Gabriel, who was an extremely violent man, and he and Bob would love to come over and facilitate here (with young offenders), if we can get some funding together! 😊