

Non-Violent Resolution in Today's World

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“My optimism rests on my belief...of the individual to develop nonviolence...In a gentle way you can shake the world” (Mahatma Gandhi). This quote in its entirety is embedded on a large stone at the Union Square in New York City. Ironically, New York City's citizens were the victims of the most violent act committed on U.S. soil in modern times on September 11, 2001. Yet, throughout the world, individuals must attempt peaceful resolutions to various conflicts, from the schoolyard to the workplace to international affairs. No matter how many obstructions, those believing in nonviolence must not concede to those who prefer hostility and brutality to diplomatic resolutions. Indeed, if they do, all that remains are more violent reactions to conflict, which in turn only breed more of the same.

Many would agree there has never been a greater time than now to develop a culture of peace. Building a future of such change is needed to guide youth to carry nonviolence into their adult lives. With violence in schools on the rise (caused both internally with students and externally by intruders when conflicts are unresolved) it is obvious that outward aggression in its most brutal form has multiplied. Recently in February, two Denver suburban middle school students were wounded by a gunman while they were leaving school on a typical day. Later investigation revealed that the gunman had no connections to the student victims, but he had attended school there eighteen years ago, leading a life in turmoil, CBS News reported. Countless other school incidents, such as a 2007 university shooting incident resulting in over thirty deaths in Virginia, occur annually when ongoing conflicts reach a deadly conclusion. According to *Safe and Drug-Free Schools: An Action Guide*, “Too many of our young people are caught up in conflicts every day they do not know how to manage—teasing, jealousy, and physical aggression...

symptoms of youth's inability to manage conflict in their lives. Teaching youth how to manage conflict in a productive way helps reduce incidents of violent behavior. Conflict resolution education is a beneficial component... in schools and communities." One such approach, peer mediation, was implemented at an Albuquerque elementary school that reported having 100 to 150 fights a month. Later that same year, fights were reduced to about ten per month using this approach. The Conflict Resolution Information Source website explains that "fellow students...often have better ideas for what will work to resolve the problem." This is just one example of what peaceful conflict resolution can accomplish and teach youth for their future.

The workplace is yet another setting where nonviolence prevails when proper conflict resolution techniques are enacted. The job site is frequently a combat zone as employees work through a host of modern day and economy-related issues, including but not limited to "downsizing, firings, drug abuse, stress, reduction in pay while working longer hours, and domestic violence," according to an article "The Workplace: A Battleground for Violence" on questia.com. The article explains how such violence is costly to employers and employees in terms of "wages and productivity, property damage, theft, and legal and medical expenses." Although employees often take it for granted, spending forty or more hours together in often stressful surroundings, increases the potential for violence. The *About.com* article "Workplace Violence: Violence Can Happen Here" (2010) cites homicide as the "second leading cause of fatal occupational injury in the U.S.," with "one thousand workers murdered and 1.5 assaulted...each year." One may wonder how acts at work escalate into this degree of danger. Obviously, early intervention through non-violent resolution needs to be initiated so it does not reach this level. The Harvard Negotiation Project, part of the Harvard Law School, works to improve negotiation practice and dispute resolution. This method is explained in the book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating*

Agreement Without Giving In by Roger Fisher and William Ury, and involves a four-step process: “1) Separate the people from the problem. 2) Focus on interests, not positions. 3) Generate a variety of possibilities before deciding on what to do. 4) Insist that the result be based on some objective standard.” In this method, the theory “Do not attack each other, attack the problem,” is employed. Also, egos and emotions must be discarded during the conflict resolution. Similarly, the *Ivey Business Journal* states that there are three methods for decision-making in the workplace: “combative, competitive, or collaborative,” with collaborative being the one that will yield the most successful outcome. “Negotiation is not a competitive sport,” the journal explains, as it produces a winning and a losing side. Naturally, therefore, the most successful labor agreements occur when employers and unions can peacefully negotiate, rather than act as competitors.

The largest nonviolent movement of all is demanded in the international setting. Here, the U.S. could certainly do its part to initiate such a trend. As a nation we cannot expect war torn countries to establish a peaceful future, when the U.S. itself, in its proclaimed “rebuilding” efforts, continues to use troops or redistribute them in Iraq and Afghanistan. Current plans call for the U.S. to withdraw all but fifty thousand or two-thirds of its troops from Iraq later this year (*The New York Times*, March 16, 2010). However, the same newspaper reported on April 11, 2010, that “30,000 U.S. extra troops” will be used in Afghanistan this year. To show the deep impact on the U.S., *About.com* reports that nearly \$900 billion of our taxpayers’ funds are either already spent or approved for military use in Iraq alone through September of this year, while nearly five thousand American casualties have occurred to date in the conflicts. The consequences to Iraq are even greater, with over 2.5 million people displaced inside their own country and almost as many refugees in other countries, while countless lives have been lost. Over a quarter of their children suffered from malnutrition by mid-2007. Finally, the Iraqi unemployment rate has more than

doubled. Even without Saddam Hussein's tyrannical leadership, Iraqi workers have not been permitted to organize, unionize, or establish workers rights, the AFL-CIO reports. With all of these devastating statistics, any critic would question why the United States remains there. Americans at home "oppose continued military intervention...but are not represented in Congress," according to an article in the *Huffington Post* reprinted on the U.S. Labor Against The War website, posted March 18, 2010. The report says that Americans representing a cross-section of political and social backgrounds met in February in Washington D.C. to organize "a way to work together to oppose militarism." These citizens, like many other Americans, realize the relationship between the violent, negative aspects of our military presence in foreign countries and our broken economy, and they have decided to do something positive--something nonviolent—to affect change and apply pressure to our government.

"Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time," stated Martin Luther King, who studied and enacted many of the practices of Gandhi in his life's pursuit of peaceful resolution. In nearly every aspect of our lives, no matter the setting— violence leads to social, political, and economic decay. To place nonviolent resolution into motion, individuals need to demonstrate peaceful resolution to youth, practice it in their daily lives, and demonstrate it in leadership roles in involvement with other countries. As a leader nation, the United States must be proactive to demonstrate this effect, so that smaller and weaker countries can learn by example. Conflicts will inevitably continue to arise; however, if the world is to thrive, nonviolent resolution is the key to its survival.

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