

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka with today's Community Comment.

In spite of my high opinion of myself, the harsh reality is that I have occasionally made mistakes or thrown my interpretations of events out in ways that make others feel I don't value their opinion. I don't ever want to do that, as every person has value and their feelings and opinions should be welcomed. I need to moderate my reaction to polarizing issues until I understand both sides.

This is harder than it sounds. Studies show most of us make up our minds about an issue based on how it was presented to us and by whom rather than by any underlying facts or alternative facts. Once I have heard something from a source I trust, I am likely to reject any other point of view.

?What sways someone if it isn't carefully researched, proven truths interpreted through a matrix of logic and experience?

It seems that conviction comes through repetition. It is by saying the same things repeatedly that those things are cemented into a person's thinking as if they are the truth. Saying something over and over in different ways sways them. Repeating something, with conviction and sincerity, will ultimately cause the listener to believe it.

Since it is a demonstrated truth that repetition reinforces belief, it is no wonder that those who obtain the majority of their information from a specific political or ideological point of view are unlikely to understand how someone could think anything else.

Don't worry, I'm sure this doesn't apply to YOU. All of your positions are carefully thought out and evaluated in the light of well-sourced, verified and verifiable data. YOU are obviously right in all things. It's the rest of us who are screwed up. Keep listening so you can tell others how to fix themselves.

How do we break out of this us-vs-them kind of thinking?

It helps to assume that people with different opinions are NOT either idiots or con artists looking to make buck on the issue. If we are all reasonably intelligent human beings, we can find ways to understand one another, even if we don't ultimately agree.

Start with definitions. Don't discuss anything with anyone without making sure that you are using the same words in the same ways. When someone talks about immigration, ask what they mean by immigration. It might not be how you use that word.

Next, find out their perceptions of the issue. This involves asking questions, not telling people what you think or – worse – telling people what THEY think. Ask, “What is it about this that bothers you? What do you think works or doesn’t?” Try repeating what they said back, using your own words, but as a question, to see if you are really hearing what they are saying.

Finally, ask their opinion about an appropriate response. Listen to how their solution flows from their definition of the issue and their perception of the problem.

Once you’ve heard them out, ask if they will be willing to hear you out. If they are, share your definitions, perceptions, and opinion about a response.

This kind of exchange is called “civil discourse.” It’s largely unknown in the modern world. It is this sort of discussion which leads to understanding and forges paths which everyone can agree on or at least understand.

With a little practice, it’s easy to do, and best of all, it’s free. If we give it a try, maybe the world around us will calm down a little.

Grace and peace to you all. This has been Lt. Roger McCort with the KINS Community Comment.