

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/forced-to-evolve>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

"We can't do it that way, because we don't do it that way."

I was in a brainstorming meeting a few years ago where someone actually said this sentence. It sounded ridiculous. At APT and Vera, we are in the business of change...that is, we're in the business of helping OTHERS change. But sometimes the mirror gets held up and we're the ones asked, or forced, to evolve.

An example at APT occurred a couple months ago when we were thinking through what to do about two kids in our summer work program who suddenly didn't have jobs. Normally we assign the kids to sites that volunteer to have kids working there; we pay their salary and provide workshops on job readiness skills. Could we have these two work at the APT office? We'd never done that before.

We had always wanted to walk the walk and have a kid work for us directly, but every year we talked ourselves out of it: We're a counseling program; what could we possibly have the kids do? Ultimately we decided that just because we hadn't done it this way didn't mean we couldn't, and that the benefit of having two young men able to work for the summer was worth the risks.

Looking back, it definitely wasn't easy. There were moments when I was convinced we had done the wrong thing. But over the course of the summer, things fell into place. Necessity had pushed us past the barriers of our own thinking, and we learned some things we would not have learned otherwise. We might even try it again!

The experience leaves me wondering about other places in our work where we can push past any we can't do it that way, because we don't do it that way thinking.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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