



Newsletter Collection

Three Essential Skills

Contents:

JFA's Three Essential Skills Are the Life of the Party – Steve Wagner, Anthony Trent (October 2013)

“What Do You Mean?” – Rebecca Haschke (September 2016)

YES = NO – Steve Wagner (October 2012)

“Wait! I Think I Can Help You!” – Steve Wagner (March 2015)

JFA's Three Essential Skills Are the Life of the Party

Training thousands to make abortion unthinkable for millions...

Impact Report



October 2013

JFA's alumni want to do one thing with their JFA training: practice. They attend multiple Seat Work and Feet Work events, and they want to teach others. They are a treasure because they come back time and again to JFA outreach events to help us reach thousands of students on campuses each year. They're also a treasure because of what their JFA training has enabled them to do when JFA trainers can't be present.

In this Impact Report, Kansas volunteer Anthony Trent shares in his own words the story of how he went from the fire of his second JFA training experience to the frying pan of a party of naysayers. He was ready to turn the debate into a dialogue.

Thank you for helping us give Anthony and hundreds of others like him the tools they need to be confident when the pressure is on.

- Stephen Wagner, Director of Training

...one person at a time.

Last weekend I had a pretty incredible experience. It was Labor Day weekend, a Sunday night, and I happened to be in Wichita visiting a friend who was hosting a party. Nothing seemed to be abnormal or different than most group functions I've attended. Of course, there was an understanding that many of this friend's friends didn't really share the same beliefs I held.

The timing was interesting because a week beforehand I had participated in my second JFA seminar and outreach at Wichita State University. Many of the people at the party were WSU students.

Later in the evening, the subject of the JFA outreach was brought up. After saying I participated in that event, one of the guys there said, "Yeah, well, we were making fun of that all day it was there. It was stupid." I replied, "Why was it stupid? We were asking questions and promoting dialogue with pro-choice students." After asking more questions, it was clear he didn't have a reason for belittling the outreach, and he admitted it.



During his first JFA outreach event, Anthony (second from left) interacts with a WSU student.

This conversation, not surprisingly, sparked a debate about abortion. While the room seemed to erupt in aggressive talking points and pseudo-listening, a person named Cole and I had a one-on-one conversation about abortion. Cole believed abortion was a woman's right during the first two trimesters of pregnancy. We found common ground that third-trimester abortions were immoral and that it makes sense to consider the unborn to be

human persons when the pregnancy is far enough along that premature babies can survive.

Cole came to the conclusion that abortion should be made illegal, even in cases of rape.

I later found out that Cole considered personhood to be based on a sort of self-awareness—"the ability to know I exist independently." As I proposed to him the Equal Rights Argument and how his explanation of rights based on self-awareness excluded newborns and third-trimester children, though, he knew it couldn't work. The conversation went on for three hours as he tried to propose new functional abilities that might bestow human rights. I then asked him, "What is the one trait that every person in this room has in common?" We came to the conclusion that it was our human nature. As we

talked even more, Cole came to the conclusion that abortion should be made illegal, even in cases of rape.

Not only was my conversation with Cole refreshing, but the other people at the party also gave me some hope. As one girl came back from a late-night McDonalds run, she sighed, “Oh, another judgmental pro-lifer.” Another person spoke up: “Oh no, this guy is different. He’s listening and is making an intelligent, logical case.”

Now back to the friend I was visiting in Wichita. She attended the *Abortion: From Debate to Dialogue* seminar a week beforehand, and she was silently overhearing the conversation the whole time. The next day we talked about the conversation, and she said, “I finally understood how that training can be put into a real conversation and that it really does work.”

“Just one year ago, I would not have been able to have productive conversations like these.”

This is why I support Justice For All. It’s small moments like these that give me assurance we can win the culture for Life. Just one year ago, I would not have been able to have productive conversations like these. This is the purpose of the training. Rather than just holding a brochure or pointing students toward an exhibit, the purpose is to use the skills we’ve learned as an ambassador for our Lord, and to do that on a daily basis. I can’t thank this staff enough for equipping me to love those with whom I speak. Thank you, and God bless.

- Anthony Trent

After reading this story, I asked Anthony whether he would have spoken up at the party before his JFA training. “I definitely would have entered into the conversation,” he said, “but it would have been much more like a debate. I would have been a really bad ambassador... I would have just taken his comments, blown them up, and intellectually humiliated him.” Fresh from two rounds of Seat Work and Feet Work with JFA, though, Anthony went into the party living out JFA’s Three Essential Skills: asking questions with an open heart, listening to understand, and finding common ground when possible.

When the outreach event was mocked, Anthony didn’t respond in kind. He asked a clarifying question. Instead of reveling in a one-against-many showdown featuring him at the center, Anthony opted for a one-on-one format in which he could listen.

When Anthony learned that Cole was pro-choice, he could have simply listed off his best pro-life arguments, whether Cole was interested or not. Instead, Anthony started with common ground: adults deserve an equal right to life. Then he labored with Cole for three hours over *Cole’s explanations* of those equal rights. When it became clear to Cole that his explanations were flawed, Anthony was ready—ready to give him a hand up with the more satisfying explanation that we deserve equal rights because we have the same human nature. It was then a very small step for Cole to embrace the unborn as humans who share that nature. If you want to learn how to approach a conversation from the Equal Rights perspective like Anthony did, join us for an upcoming JFA training event (www.jfaweb.org/Register). Until then, enjoy stories from JFA missionaries in a newsletter collection entitled “The Equal Rights Argument” (www.jfaweb.org/Equal-Rights).



Since the party Anthony has continued to put his JFA training into practice. He’s created other Repeat Work conversations in his everyday life, and he’s joined the JFA team for six additional days of outreach, including one he arranged on his own campus (see photo above). For more discussion with Anthony about the value of practicing the Three Essential Skills, see my interview with him at www.jfaweb.org/Impact/Anthony-Interview.

What could have been a disaster became a delight for Anthony, for Cole, and for the others at the party. Thank you for helping us train pro-life advocates like Anthony to change hearts and minds in their everyday lives.

- Stephen Wagner, Director of Training

To help us continue training leaders like Anthony,
go to: www.jfaweb.org/donate





Rebecca's Reflections



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September 2016

“What Do You Mean?”

The Question that Saved My Conversation

Dear Supporters,

Early in my conversation with Kenton and Maggie, it was established that we all believed that the unborn is biologically human at fertilization. But for Kenton and Maggie (students I spoke with at Colorado State University—Fort Collins), the biological facts weren't enough to persuade them that unborn humans have the same right to life as the rest of us. As I have done in many other conversations (see my February 2016 newsletter), I began to explore the Equal Rights Argument with them.

In the midst of this part of the discussion, I made a mistake—a mistake that marked a pivotal turning point for how the conversation would continue. Here's a glimpse of that portion of our conversation, beginning with my introduction to the Equal Rights Argument:

Me: Kenton and Maggie, do you mind if I ask you a few questions that are not related to the unborn or abortion?

Kenton: Sure. *[Maggie nodded her head in agreement.]*

Me: Can we agree that all of us walking around on campus deserve equal treatment, at least regarding our basic right to life?

Kenton: Of course. *[Maggie nodded once again.]*

Me: Can we agree that in order for us to demand equal treatment, there has to be something the same about us? It doesn't make sense to demand to be treated equally if there isn't anything equal about us, right?

Kenton: Yeah, that makes sense. I can agree with that.

Me: So what is the same about us? What is the thing that ties us all together?

Kenton: *[confidently]* Our human nature.

[In shock, I smiled. I would've worded my answer in exactly the same way! I am used to hearing that philosophical term from our community of trainers; but never in the 200+ times that I had walked someone through the Equal Rights Argument had I heard a student respond that what makes us equal is “human

nature” — not even pro-life students. Typically students just say, “Because we're human,” or else they give a reason related to an ability (“we can all think,” etc.).]

Me: *[still smiling and somewhat surprised]* Kenton, we're on the same page. I agree that our human nature is the fundamental reason you, Maggie, and I should all be treated equally, at least regarding the basic right to life. Do you see any logical consequences of that belief, consequences related specifically to the legalization of abortion?

Kenton: *[perplexed]* What do you mean?

Me: If we agree that it is our human nature which is a basis for our equal rights, shouldn't everyone who has that human nature be included?

Kenton: Well, yes, but I still don't see what you mean.

Me: If the unborn have that human nature, shouldn't they be granted the same equal right to life that we have?

Kenton: Oh, okay. I see what you're saying, but that's where I disagree. I don't think the unborn has a human nature like you and I do. They can't do what we do.



[After this, I realized I'd made a mistake. To clear things up, I knew I needed to acknowledge it.]

Me: Oh goodness! Kenton, I'm sorry. I made an assumption about what you meant earlier. I was so excited that you used the words "human nature" that I just figured you meant the same thing that I meant. But now I realize that we've been operating on two different definitions of "human nature." So let's each explain our definitions. What does "human nature" mean to you?

Kenton: *[He turned toward Maggie and excitedly lifted his hands into the air.]* Whoa! Maggie, we've met someone who *actually wants* to know what I believe! She *wants* to have a real conversation. *[He turned back toward me and smiled.]* Hmm...human nature. For me, it means all the things that make us, you know, different from other species. We have emotions, empathy, and rational thought. We are self-aware and know we exist. The unborn doesn't have and can't do those things.

Me: Thanks, Kenton. That's helpful. What I meant by "human nature" is related to your description, but differs in a significant way. *[Kenton leaned in and furrowed his brow like he was putting on his thinking cap.]* Our human nature includes all of the traits and abilities you just mentioned—rational thought, self-awareness, etc. However, it doesn't mean the *present ability* of a human organism to do each of those things. Human nature means that an organism has the *inherent capacity* for those traits to come to fruition as the being matures.

That was really wordy, so let me explain it a little more. Let's take this one cell as an example. *[I then pointed to a picture of a human embryo at fertilization in the Justice For All Exhibit Brochure.]* When the sperm and egg come together, they cease to exist. A new genetically distinct human organism comes into existence. This organism matures to its next stage of development on its own. It does so from within itself in the same way that you and I do. Within this one cell is the programming for this being to eventually be self-aware, have rational thought, etc. This being [i.e. the human at fertilization] just can't do those things yet. This is similar to a newborn human. A newborn isn't self-aware nor does he have rational thought or the ability to run, walk, or talk. But because of the nature of the newborn, his *human nature*, he holds these abilities inside of him. As he continues to develop, these abilities come to fruition.

The conversation continued for quite a while longer. Kenton shared his thoughts more often than Maggie did. Before departing, however, Maggie was the first one to extend her hand for a handshake and say, "Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. I have a lot to go home and think about."

There are two lessons I learned from my interaction with Kenton and Maggie that I hope will be helpful to you.

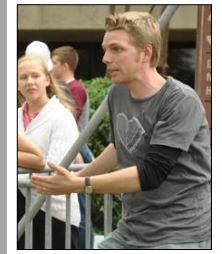
Lesson 1: Be on the lookout for misguided assumptions you've made about what someone thinks, feels, or intends.

Even though someone uses the same words we as pro-life advocates might use, that person may have a different intended meaning from ours.

Lesson 2: Acknowledge when you have made an assumption, and ask for clarification. One of the most pivotal points of this conversation occurred when I admitted my mistake and sought clarification by asking Kenton, "What do you mean by that?" Kenton's response of throwing his hands in the air to express excitement was unexpected, yet revealing. He was astonished that someone *actually wanted* to know his thoughts. I wonder how many conversations Kenton had experienced in which the other person only wanted to tell him *her* thoughts. After acknowledging my erroneous assumption, asking for clarification, and giving him time to explain his thoughts, he seemed much more open to hearing mine. This is probably because he knew I cared about *his* thoughts. It was the acknowledgement of my mistake that let Kenton know I cared.

I encourage you to apply these two lessons to conversations about all topics, not just conversations about abortion. Had I not acknowledged my mistake, it is possible Maggie and Kenton would not have been as open to hearing my opinion, or they may have even walked away frustrated before I shared it. Instead, at the end of the conversation Maggie felt as though she had "a lot to go home and think about." I hope these tips, as well as the content I shared with these students, will aid you in having similarly productive conversations.

Rebecca J. Haschke



Two KU Sisters Expose the Problem of Assumptions

STEPHEN WAGNER'S MONTHLY UPDATE

OCTOBER 5, 2012

Dear Friend,

Keisha was signing the “NO” side of our poll table, “Should Abortion Remain Legal?”

Across the table, Emi asked, “Hey, Sister, what did you write?” Emi looked at me and felt the need to confirm, “She actually is my sister.”

While Emi signed the “YES” side, I asked Keisha (on the “NO” side), “Do you think abortion should be illegal in every case?”

“Not in the case of rape,” she said confidently.

Emi seemed interested in the conversation, so I included her. “You signed the ‘YES’ side. Do you think abortion should remain legal through all nine months?”

For the next few minutes, I asked Emi a series of questions, and finally, Emi’s position was clear: she thought that *only* RU-486 abortion should be legal.

I clarified that the chemical abortion technique called RU-486 was only used from about four to nine weeks gestation (about two to seven weeks post-fertilization).



Cast of Characters: Emi (far right, with backpack), Keisha (green folder), and I (grey shirt) ponder the ramifications of my “Cabin in the Blizzard” story while two Benedictine College students from my mentor group, Chris (in black) and Clare (in yellow), listen in. Although the camera caught us all wincing at some portion of my philosophical example, we enjoyed a pleasant (albeit lively) exchange in front of the JFA Poll Table (“Should Abortion Remain Legal?”) at the University of Kansas (KU) in September.



JUSTICE FOR ALL TRAINS THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

WEB: WWW.JFAWEB.ORG

STEVE'S UPDATES: WWW.HBMM.NET

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Now I knew at what *time* of the pregnancy Emi thought abortion should be legal, and I also knew she only approved of one *type* of abortion procedure – chemical abortion. I continued asking questions, though, until I understood in what *circumstances* Emi thought abortion should be legal.

Her clarification floored me. Emi thought abortion should only be legal in the case of rape and if the mother’s life is in danger. In other words, she thought abortion should be legal only in two rare circumstances (comprising not much more than 5%, if that), and only with one procedure (RU-486) used only early in the pregnancy.

These two sisters appeared at first to have completely opposite positions. Yet, when I took the time to ask a few questions, their positions turned out to be very similar. Emi believed that about 95% of abortions should *not* be legal. This doesn’t sound very “pro-choice” at all!

	Emi	Keisha
Should Abortion Remain Legal?	YES	NO
We Might Assume Their Responses Meant...	“I’m pro-choice. Abortion should generally be legal.”	“I’m pro-life. Abortion should generally not be legal.”
Using “Three Essential Skills,” We Discovered Their Responses Actually Meant...	“Abortion should be legal only in two circumstances: <i>rape and life is in danger.</i> ”	“Abortion should be legal only in the case of <i>rape.</i> ”

Clare and Chris, students from Benedictine College, were among those listening in to my conversation with Emi and Keisha. When I was serving as their mentor in our seminar at Benedictine just two days prior, I led them in a role play activity to highlight the fact that all of us tend to assume too much and ask too few questions.

I began the role play by saying, “I’m pro-choice,” but then I hid my position until they asked specific questions to uncover what “I’m pro-choice” meant. My hidden position was this: “Abortion should be legal only in the case of rape and the life of the mother for all nine months.”

The experience surprises students. They see how much their assumptions are working under the surface. Clare, Chris, and I again experienced this moment of surprise two days later in real life. Our conversation with Emi and Keisha exposed assumptions for what they are: vexing menaces to good dialogue. Without thinking about it, many of us are in the habit of assuming we know what other people think, even if they share only a sound bite or quick statement regarding their views.

We should build a different habit of assuming: assume we *don’t* know what someone means until we ask for lots of clarification. Because I was attempting to show this courtesy to Emi and Keisha, they were more ready to consider my challenge to their view that abortion should be legal in the case of rape. I shared a story a few of my colleagues and I have developed: “The Cabin in the Blizzard.” I think especially Emi was able to consider my argument and rethink her view with me because I had taken the time to get to know her view before I attempted to change it.

**We should build a different habit of assuming:
Assume we *don’t* know what someone means...**

Because of your support, students like Clare and Chris are learning to ask clarifying questions in order to listen with understanding. That’s a good practice for all of us.

Thank you,
Stephen

P.S. I hope to share the “Cabin in the Blizzard” story in a future newsletter. If you can’t wait, however, contact me (316-683-6426). I’d be happy to share it with you, along with some tips for using it in conversation. [April 2013 update: See www.jfaweb.org/DFG to read the story.]

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“Wait! I Think I Can Help You!”

Common Ground to the Rescue...Again



JFA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MONTHLY LETTER

MARCH 2015

Dear Friend,

I could tell things weren't going to end well. Two women were just finishing a brief conversation at JFA's ten-foot kiosk display at Arizona State University in February. The woman on my left was advocating for the choice of abortion, and the woman on my right was adamant that abortion kills a baby. Their voices escalated as I came into earshot:

Pro-Choice Woman: Women need choice.

Pro-Life Woman: It's killing a baby.

Pro-Choice Woman: But what about the woman's right to her body? The woman...

Pro-Life Woman: [cutting her off] I don't care what you say; it's a baby. Abortion is murder. You think it should be...

Pro-Choice Woman: [cutting her off] You don't know what you're talking about.

The pro-choice woman capped the marker she had been using to write on the free speech board and prepared to leave the scene. I had to act quickly. I felt as if I had emerged from a telephone booth as *Common Ground Man*, clad in spandex with a shining “CG” emblazoned across my chest. My arms outstretched and animated, I said something like:

Steve: Wait! I think I can help you. I think I can help both of you find common ground.

The pro-choice woman seemed to brighten up at the prospect of something different. I thought the pro-life woman might not be willing to participate in my little experiment, but I hoped a few questions would give her reason to stay. I was almost certain these two would agree about one kind of abortion. I turned to the pro-choice woman first:

Steve: What do you think about abortion at 39 weeks? Do you think it should be legal?

Pro-Choice Woman: [disgusted] Now that's way too late. I don't have any tolerance for a woman who does that...I'd have to describe that sort of abortion as...ridiculous.

Steve: [turning to the pro-life woman] What about you? What do you think about 39-week abortion?

Pro-Life Woman: [a bit suspicious] It's the same as any abortion. It doesn't matter the time. It's killing a human.

Steve: I understand that that is your perspective. But let's focus only on 39-week abortions right now. What do you think about those?

Pro-Life Woman: It's killing. It's murder. That woman who gets that abortion is crazy.



It's my conjecture that in the rare case of abortion at this stage the doctor is usually recommending abortion even though the woman wants the child, so I wasn't eager to see women who have these abortions chastised as “crazy.” I was eager, however, for each of these two to see that the other person was *not* crazy. To help, we had discovered one small item of common ground: both women objected to abortion itself at this stage. I continued by pointing out a few other abortions about which I thought we all could agree. Here's an example:

Steve: [turning to the pro-choice woman] What do you think about aborting a female fetus just because she's female?

Pro-Choice Woman: I'm not for that...

Pro-Life Woman: It doesn't matter why she's doing it. It's still killing.



JUSTICE FOR ALL — TRAINING THOUSANDS TO MAKE ABORTION UNTHINKABLE FOR MILLIONS, ONE PERSON AT A TIME.

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Having focused on points the pro-life woman would think were obvious, I then attempted to see if I could help the pro-life woman to grant a point that the pro-choice woman would think was obvious:

Steve: Can we all agree that some abortions are more understandable than others?

Pro-Life Woman: Don't you see that I think abortion is killing regardless of when or why?

Steve: I appreciate that point, but I'm referring to something a bit different. Do you have more sympathy for a woman who is beaten by her boyfriend, raped, gets pregnant, and has an abortion than you have for a woman who has plenty of money and family support but gets an abortion flippantly?

Pro-Choice Woman: I do.

Pro-Life Woman: I still think both of those abortions are killing.

Steve: I understand, but don't you naturally have more sympathy for the woman who is raped and gets an abortion than for the one who is not raped and gets an abortion? That's all I'm asking.

Pro-Life Woman: I guess so, but you have to realize the way I see this. Abortion kills a human.

This dear pro-life woman had crystal clarity about the unborn and abortion, so I surely did not want to discourage her. I wanted her to feel affirmed, but I also wanted her to have a new experience. Imagine an orphan who has been ignored on the doorsteps of so many but is now finally invited in and interviewed, with the real hope of being adopted for good. I wanted this woman to have the experience of watching the truth she was proposing finally get invited in and considered, with the real hope that it might now be adopted. It's unfortunate that she had to leave before we got to the best part of the conversation, the part that came next.

I continued to ask the pro-choice woman for clarification about what she believed regarding abortion, and the reasons for her beliefs. We were discussing viability for a bit, and then one of her friends, an activist for drug legalization, came up and greeted her. When the activist found out what we were discussing, she predicted that the two of them had very similar views on abortion. Her prediction proved true, and the two of them now played tag-team, working out a defense of abortion based on viability, back-alley abortion, and the claim that keeping abortion legal is the most neutral, appropriate position in a pluralistic society.

Just thirty minutes later, though, we were discussing a question I had proposed: *If we agree that we as adults deserve to be treated equally, what is the one thing we have the same that demands equal treatment?* The three of us were now fully engaged in testing different explanations for these equal rights. Since I had spent a good deal of time listening in order to understand these women (along with offering some responses to their arguments for abortion), they had decided to listen with similar interest. I defended "human nature" as the best explanation for equal rights (see the link below for more), and pointed out that if human nature explains our basic right to life, and the unborn also has that nature, then the unborn has the same right to life. Perhaps for the first time, these women were considering the merits of this idea.

When these women finally decided they needed to go and study for class, they were effusive about how nice I was and about how this was the best conversation they had ever had with a pro-life advocate. This was encouraging, but accolades were not my aim or measure of success. Instead, I evaluated the conversation with this question: Did I balance *love* and *truth* in such a way that these women were encountering both love *and* truth at every point in the conversation? I listened as if each of these women brought something important to the discussion. I searched for common ground in the ideas they shared. I shared my own perspective with an emphasis on equal rights for adults, a phenomenon on which we all agreed. The result was that these women embraced the opportunity to invite the truth in to be considered. Let's pray that on further reflection or in further interaction over email, these women come to fully apprehend the truth that the unborn and they themselves have intrinsic worth as humans made in God's image.



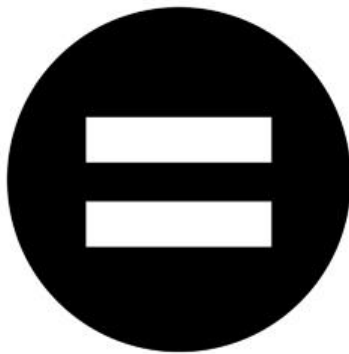
Warmly,

Steve Wagner
Executive Director, JFA

Note: Since I'm recounting this conversation from memory, without the aid of notes, audio, or video, all I'm able to do here is try to capture the gist of what was said. Even in the absence of a word-for-word rendering of the dialogue, though, the point still stands.

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