
JUST LOVE.

A Just Love Guide to Listening and Relationship Building

Why is this important?

As Christians, relationships are foundational to what we believe. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is a God of relationship, and has created us for relationship with him and each other. It is unsurprising, then, that relationships will be important for an organisation looking to do God's work.

Relationships build support – other people and organisations are much more likely to be supportive of and interested in what Just Love are doing if they know you, the people who are running it. It is important to share with people your passions and reasons for pursuing justice, and give them an opportunity to do the same. This will help to win people over to your cause, and will help you to avoid conflict and disunity. Organisations are less likely to speak badly of one another if they know the people behind the projects and the reasons why they do what they do.

Relationships build power – we can think of power in terms of the ability to get things done, to make things happen. Other organisations will have resources, ideas and expertise, and may have similar interests to you. By building a relationship you can explore opportunities to think and work together on an issue that you both care about.

How do I get started?

As a Just Love committee, you will want to begin building relationships with those who have maximum influence in the areas you want to work. This will primarily be the world of Christian students in your town or city. You can conduct a 'power analysis' of this world – who are the individuals or organisations that are most able to make things happen amongst the Christian students? It is likely that the major student churches and the Christian Union will be towards the top of this list – so prioritise meeting with the church student workers, and the CU exec and UCCF staff worker. There may be other prominent Christian organisations, and individual students who are well known and influential – get to know them, get their views on what you are doing, and encourage them to be a part of it.

Depending on the ways in which you are 'releasing' students to engage with social justice, you may also want to repeat this process for those organisations involved with homelessness, anti-trafficking, or whatever issue your Just Love group is likely to engage with. Research and meet the organisations that are influential.

Having a one-to-one

Often, the best way to establish a good relationship with someone is through a one-to-one meeting. Contact the person you want to meet, say that you want to share some of what you're doing with them, and that you'd like to get their input and build a relationship with them/their organisation.

In the meeting, it is just as important to get to know each other personally as it is to go through the formal information about your organisations. If you build a good personal relationship, your organisations are more likely to get along. Show genuine interest in how the other person spends their time, what their ambitions and dreams are, who their family and friends are, where they are from, what their story and formative moments are, what their beliefs and values are – and try to share some of those aspects of yourself with them. This can seem like an unusual way to handle a meeting – you may want to set it up at the beginning by saying something like 'before we talk about Just Love and your church/CU, perhaps we could get to know a bit more about each other.' Once you have each shared a bit about yourselves, it will be easier to identify that person's self interest – the things that they have an interest in seeing happen.

One of the goals of your meeting should be to intentionally build power (the ability to get things done) around common self-interest. You might learn that the person you were talking to became a Christian a couple of years ago and that this completely turned their life around, and are passionate about seeing others come to faith. This is their self-interest, and Just Love can serve that – you can talk about people who are put off of Christianity by the hypocrisy, and the fact that the actions of Christians don't match the love they preach – and suggest that Just Love can be an antidote to that and can help people come to faith. The person you meet might have seen friends drift away from God as they weren't given practical ways to live out their faith – Just Love can help with that issue too. Finding their self-interest, and explaining how Just Love can support that, is likely to be a better approach than a meeting in which you argue that Just Love is doing the right thing and they are not. Do your best to find common self-interest before resorting to that kind of discussion.

How do I maintain the relationship?

The most obvious way of doing this is just to stay in contact and keep meeting. Once you have worked out which are the key relationships for your Just Love group, ensure that meetings are taking place to maintain these relationships at least once a term.

If you are working together with a particular organisation, be sure to show integrity and quality and follow through on what you say you will do. It is often good to under-promise and over-deliver, as this will leave people with a positive impression of you. You may find that others do not follow through on their promises – in the student world in particular this can be a problem, but that is no reason for you to lower your level. Just Love groups should handle their aspects of a partnership with high quality.

If you deliver on your promises, if your organisation is proving successful, and if your relationship network is growing, you may start to become a trusted advisor for other organisations. Make the most of this – give advice on areas that you've done well in, and help to connect different people and organisations that you think might benefit from getting to know each other. Be willing to give in relationships just as you would hope for others to do with you.