

The Turkey Prank

What do you get when you put five graduating seniors, five or six turkeys, and a need to be remembered, together in an empty high school late at night? Answer: a disaster.

The original plan was to take the turkeys from a local turkey farm, put them in the high school to run around all night, and make a mess. However, once inside the school, the young men reported that everyone's adrenalin kicked in and a crown mentality took over.

Turkeys were stuffed into lockers so they would fly out at unsuspecting students the next morning. One turkey was butchered and bled up and down the halls before dying. Another turkey was so disorientated into a floor-to-ceiling window and broke its neck. The mayhem was indescribable when the janitor arrived for school the next day. The job before him seemed horrific.

The case went through the legal system, but the judge realized the small community had gaping wounds that the legal system could not address. So the case was referred to the local restorative justice program for a conference.

When the case was received by the program, a decision needed to be made about whom to invite to the conference in addition to the five young men and their parents, who had already agreed to attend. Individuals, including a member of the faith community, were chosen to represent the community at large. The superintendent, principal, three school-board members, three teachers, and the janitor were asked to participate. A member of the media was asked to join the conference, with the understanding that he was there as a community member.

The total number of attendees was 35, which included one lead facilitator and five trained community volunteer facilitators.

The process of pre-conferencing with participants began with a meeting of the five seniors and their parents. A second meeting was held with representatives of the school community, and it included the visibly angry janitor. The janitor wanted to participate but insisted he would not be part of a conference in which they would get him to “sing Kum Ba Yah.”

The tension during the final conference was high as it began. School representatives spoke first about their feelings of anger and betrayal, while at the same time acknowledging the students’ positive qualities.

The students were also given an opportunity to speak and talked of how the prank escalated out of control. They expressed shame and embarrassment because of their behavior and apologized to those present, including their parents. The final young man to speak was flushed and shaking. He commented about how difficult it was for him to walk down Main Street and make eye contact with anyone because he was so ashamed of what he had done.

Near the end of the conference, the facilitator asked if there were any final comments. The janitor raised his hand and the room fell silent. He addressed all of the young men, saying he accepted their apologies. He then turned to the last young man who had spoken and said to him, “The next time you see me on the street, you can look me in the eye because I will remember you for who you were tonight and not for what you did.”

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