

Choice Theory® in Kenya
by Kim Olver

In August 2007, I had the awesome opportunity to bring Choice Theory® to a unique group of people in Thika, Kenya. While there, I stayed with a local family and was pleased to live as an African for a week. I ate the foods, slept in their bed (which is nothing like the beds we have here), washed up without hot running water and rode the Mutatus (public transportation the equivalent of a 12-passenger van that they fit over 20 people in when busy). The only thing I didn't do was drink the water.

The people were wonderful. I don't think I've ever had a group more interested in learning . . . they didn't really care what it was, as long as it was information they could use. I was reminded about how great learning can be when it is fun and useful. I was so honored when the participants gave me the Swahili name of Mwalima or teacher. If you visit <http://www.coachingforexcellence.biz/Africa.shtml>, you can see the group playing, "This is a What" African-style and singing some native songs with great passion. This group had so much fun learning, they were amazing.

The thing that's so interesting about this is that on Monday when we started, the participants were accustomed to a typical education model—sitting at desks, eyes forward, taking notes and absolutely NO fun. They had no idea what they were in for as they entered the room and saw me with a felt chart on the floor, desks arranged in a circle, multiple koosh balls and colorful workbooks. The idea they could choose the color they liked was quite foreign to them. Their ability to throw koosh balls during class was unprecedented.

We had 17 core people in the Basic Intensive Week in Reality Therapy and Choice Theory®. There were others who joined in when they were able but 17 partook in the entire week. The participants were very eclectic. There were men and women, some college students, a college professor, a counselor, a teacher, a pastor, missionaries, business owners, secretaries and others.

Something that always surprises me about Choice Theory® is the universality across cultures. These participants understood and accepted the five basic needs and the fact that external control was ruining relationships. They became committed to implementing the Caring Relationship Habits in their lives. They were eager to try Reality Therapy as a self-evaluation process in their own lives and in the lives of those they influence. They learned to focus on the things over which they have control, as opposed to circumstances and other people they don't control.

Kenyans have a culture in which women are subservient to their husbands. It would have been easy for me to become righteous and talk about how that is wrong. However, once again Choice Theory® and trusting the process helped me. Who's to say their way is wrong and my way is right? I can only know what is right for me. Explaining Choice Theory® within their cultural context was powerful, both for them and for me. We talked about wives still having a need for power and if husbands expected subjugation, then they

would simultaneously want to be ensuring their wives had other responsible ways to get their power need met. This seemed to make sense both to the men and women in the group. Choice Theory® really does cut across all cultural groups.

In the process of teaching them Choice Theory®, Reality Therapy, Lead Management and Quality School concepts, I learned so much. I learned about their culture. I learned to appreciate the wealth of material things I have available to me. I learned people can be very content and fulfilled even when they are economically disadvantaged. I learned there are some basic truths that connect all humanity.

What was interesting to me is how happy these students seemed, despite their lack of material things. They did not complain about wanting more. They seemed content. Very few people had personal transportation and walked everywhere. It is not uncommon to walk four or more miles to go to the store. At first, I felt sorry about that, but then I thought about how they seemed much healthier. There was no obesity that I could see, so who is better off? We have convenience and material things. They had contentment and health.

I wouldn't trade my experience with the people of Thika for anything. The experience changed my life and I am hopeful one day I will be able to return.

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Kim Olver, LPC was certified in Reality Therapy and Choice Theory in 1992 and has been a certified instructor for the William Glasser Institute since 1993. She has literally taught thousands of people these concepts. She has also been an avid student and teacher in the field of self-development and has created her own revolutionary breakthrough process called, Inside Out Empowerment. To learn more go to <http://www.choicetheorycentral.com>.