

Life Notes

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Finding Your Voice

By Bonnie Henriksen, Life Coach, Trainer & Group Facilitator

I went with my elderly mother to visit her doctor. She was intimidated by the technical language he used to describe her condition. She didn't understand. She didn't say a word. She wouldn't be able to follow his instructions, or understand what ailment afflicted her.

My daughter called from college. "Mom, I don't understand my professor. I go to class. I read the assignments. I don't get what he's talking about. I am going to fail the exam. I should drop out of his class."

Whoa! Hold the phone! What stopped these individuals from asking for what they needed? Have you been in situations where you are confused, unclear, misunderstanding the communication or being misunderstood? Do you speak up for yourself? What silences your voice? Is it fear of sounding stupid? Are you intimidated by another person? Do you think you have it wrong and assume the other person is right? How does staying silent improve the situation? As a coach, I enjoy watching clients discover their voices.

I can assure you: You have a voice and your voice is important! If you have trouble speaking up, here is a process to build your confidence. Breaking down the mental steps helps you identify what stops you from speaking up.

Ask yourself, "What's in my way of speaking up? What am I afraid of?" When you identify what is blocking you, you can choose how to move forward. *The fight is easier when you recognize the enemy.* In my mom's case, she knew the doctor was informed and well educated and, as such, deserved her respect. Respect for his position made her afraid to question his authority. She assumed this was the way he must speak to her. First of all, never *assume*.

Next, consider if your fear is real or one you are making up. If it is imagined, *what* are you making up? Mom's fear was partly real and partly a perception she invented. The doctor is a well educated professional with authority to speak to a variety of health issues. He deserves respect. However, fear doesn't serve either him or his patients. Mom confused fear and respect. She did not have to be silent or listen to confusing technical lingo.

Once you recognize what's stopping you, weigh your options for confronting the fear or blockage. Ask yourself, "What if I speak up? What's the good that can come of my speaking up? What's the bad?" Compare good against bad. My daughter's class difficulties provide a great example. She asked herself, "What if I talk to my profes-

sor? He could offer me a tutor, extra help outside of class, an option for extra credit, an extension to catch up in my work, etc. The *worst* he can tell me is there is nothing he can do. Then I'll be no worse off than I am now. What if I don't say anything to my professor? I stay in the struggle and fail the course. Which offers me greater possibility?" More than one possibility creates choice. It became obvious to her to choose the option with the most positive potential reward. She scheduled an appointment with the instructor, got the help she hoped for and passed the course! When you compare what you can gain by speaking up to what you might lose, and gains outweigh losses, you will quickly realize the benefits of speaking up. It empowers you. It makes it easier next time and even easier the time after that.

Election time is approaching. Candidates know the value of each voice in their constituency. They pay big money to get your voice to support them. Wow! Knowing that my voice is worth thousands of dollars of someone else's money is confirmation that it is important! Don't let fear, assumptions or vivid imagination keep you from speaking up for what you need and want in your life. If you don't speak up for you, rarely will anyone else. I was with Mom in the clinic that day. I needed the doctor to explain so we both could understand. My daughter learned that asking for help and being upfront about her struggle is a valuable tool for success. Are you not speaking up for something that could make a difference in your life? What's keeping you from expressing yourself? What choices will speaking up offer? I challenge you this month to speak up for yourself. Vote too. It's a powerful use of your voice and an American privilege.

It's nice chatting with you. I always enjoy hearing how *Life Notes'* coaching tips help my readers. Share your thoughts and successes www.lifesongcoaching.com If you are interested in learning about life coaching and discovering a more compelling life, call me at 218-327-2691 or visit the website. We'll make a plan!



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