

HOW TO GET WHAT YOU WANT: THE FINE ART OF SPEAKING!

by Deb Elkin, LPC

In the last issue, I talked about the difficulty many people have speaking their truth and the impact that has on us and on our relationships (I Can't Say That!). Today we look at some tools we can use to begin breaking these old patterns and start getting more of what we want in our lives.

Your first task is to get quiet enough to be able to listen inside to what it is you are feeling, wanting or needing. For many of us, this is not an easy task! Our minds can be very good at keeping busy and not letting us listen. Or we may also be very good at shutting down and numbing out. But getting quiet is required, for how can we speak our truth if we can't hear it?

So start by making a commitment to yourself to take time to go inside and get quiet, daily. Try and set aside the same time each day, about 10-15 minutes. This will help remind you to do it and will also get you into a routine of making time for yourself. (It also gives a message to your inner self that you are important enough to make time for.) Then, in that quiet time, review your day. What went well? What are you pleased about? Who did you connect well with? What bugged you? What are you dissatisfied with? Who annoyed you or hurt your feelings or made you angry? Be honest. That is why you are doing this.

Once that gets clear, then it's time to take action and speak. It's important to decide what to act on and what to let go. You can in part determine that by noticing who you will hold hurts, resentments or grudges against if you don't speak. Those are generally the ones you most need to clear. Yet you also need to take into account who is not approachable because trying to speak your truth to people who will not hear you will likely just anger and frustrate you even more. (Know that there's a fine line between who is truly not receptive and who is scary to approach. Be sure you are honest with yourself here too.)

So you're ready to speak. Here are some simple tools for you to use.

- Use "I statements." "I statements" are statements that begin with "I" and state what it is you are thinking or feeling. In using them, it helps you get clear on what it is you actually do want or feel. And when you speak that, clearly and cleanly, the other person is more likely to meet your needs. For example:
My feelings get hurt when you don't say thank you. I feel unappreciated and taken for granted.
...or...
I don't like it when you tell me you will be here at 7:00 and you don't show up until 7:30. It feels like you don't think my time is important and it is.
- Keep it simple and to the point. The shorter it is, the easier it will

be to hear. The clearer it is, the less room for misunderstanding.

- Only tackle one topic at a time. More than one topic muddies the waters and makes it more complicated for the receiver to respond to you. You are also less likely to get a satisfactory response or outcome if you bring up more than one topic at a time.
- Point out specific, observable behaviors so that they know exactly what you are talking about. When you are concrete and specific, it is hard to argue or disagree with what you are presenting. Remember tone of voice, how you say it, is also important here. For example:
I'm noticing that you aren't saying very much and you aren't making eye contact with me. I'm wondering what's going on.
...or...
When I'm talking and trying to tell you something, you keep interrupting me in the middle of my sentence. I wish you would wait until I finish.
- Avoid using generalizations and being vague. When you speak in generalizations and with vagueness, the receiver never really knows what s/he did to upset you. That makes it hard to respond to you and you are less likely to get what you want. For example:
You're so insensitive!
Don't be ridiculous!
- Avoid always and never. It is rarely true that someone "always" or "never" does something, and it puts the receiver on the defensive.
- Avoid name calling, accusing, or blaming. It leaves the receiver feeling attacked and/or shamed, and will again put them on the defensive. You're less likely to get what you want when you do these things.

Remember that learning to speak your truth to people after years of not doing it takes practice, diligence, and patience. It requires that you give yourself permission to make mistakes while you are learning and not expect yourself to do it perfectly right from the start. Begin with people who feel safe to you. This ensures a more likely success and will be less scary. Then when you have some experience and confidence under your belt, take on the tougher ones. Be sure to celebrate not only your successes but your efforts, because you are taking a step towards getting more of what you want in your life. That IS worth celebrating! YOU are worth celebrating.