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A monthly column about business and more—by contributing writers, pictured left to right, Laura V. Page, Lori Silverman, Eve B. Scheffenacker, Julie Hedlund and BJ Pfeiffer.



The true power of silence

By Lori L. Silverman

On my quest to date 100 different men from Labor Day to New Year's Eve in 2000 (research for an Internet dating article), I met a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine on a Saturday afternoon at his Milwaukee home. We shared a cup of tea and some friendly banter, after which he asked me to close my eyes and sit quietly. This request did not surprise me; he practiced alternative forms of care with his patients. A few minutes later he gently said, "You're not being quiet. Quiet your inner conversation." I tried. Real hard. After some time he murmured, "That's better." Minutes later, I opened my eyes.

While we had a second date, we never did discuss this episode. Nor did I give a second thought to the situation until summer 2005.

What you can gain

That is when I lost my voice for weeks on end — an occupational hazard for a consultant/speaker like me. My dad said fatigue could be the cause. So I slept for hours. While I became refreshed, my voice did not return. Others suggested I seek medical care or a voice coach. But I did not feel ill. Nor did I feel I was breathing incorrectly. Then a close friend suggested acupuncture. That felt right.

When you have needles sticking out from various body parts, lying still is non-negotiable. I saw such amazing colors. Vivid purples, blues, reds and yellows. (All of which decorate my new home in Arizona.) I began tuning into my thoughts, most of which were negative or self-defeating. This shocked me. So I decided to silence the chatter. It took awhile. The result? I felt a sense of inner peace and happiness like never before.

Over time, I became more grounded. Calm. Small stuff, even big stuff, no longer rattled me. By clearing my mind, answers to perplexing problems just showed up. Like

magic. My sleep, often punctuated by insomnia, now came easy. I was freed from thoughts that raced through my mind at a million miles an hour. I also was able to slow down my outer reactions when people tried to bait me or engage me in debate, a form of communication I no longer find valuable. And, my energy heightened, allowing me to focus on important matters for long periods of time.

While I have always been a confident person, I actually felt stronger. More powerful. But in a quieter, softer way. Through silence, I realized that life is about the *conscious* choices we make each and every day, which meant being more fully present in the moment. Not surprisingly, I regained my voice. A voice that sounds deeper and richer than before.

Techniques you can try

Are any of these outcomes attractive to you? Would you like to release yourself — even if only for five minutes a day — from the demands surrounding you? To access an inner silence that has the ability to inform your outer behaviors? Try these techniques.

1. Practice some form of meditation.
2. Connect with nature. Through hiking or a slow walk. Kayaking. Or gardening. Lay on the grass (or in a hammock) and close your eyes. Pay attention to the sounds around you.
3. Engage in yoga or Tai Chi or another form of centering activity.
4. Listen to music that transports you to another place and time.
5. Engage in prayer.
6. Get regular massages. Or try acupuncture treatments.
7. Separate yourself for short periods of time from your computer, BlackBerry, TV, cell phone and other pieces of technology

that consume your life.

8. Sit still. To drown out external distractions, use a white noise machine or a noise-canceling headset.
9. Seek out a place of beauty. Stop to admire a piece of artwork, a special room in your home, a spot that you love.

To kick-start the process, try going cold turkey like Karen Dietz, leadership coach, Polaris Associates, Inc. During extended leadership training, she embraced three consecutive days of silence — no talking, singing, reading, writing, exercising, cooking, extended bathing or distractions. While a profound sense of peace overcame her, she also had a deep insight. "I ran through all my thoughts (tapes) in two and a half hours. I was simply running the same tapes, thinking they were different. And then I realized it only took a couple hours to think EVERYTHING. I learned how addicted I was to my thoughts and how I was easily distracted by [them]. And I wondered at the miracle of thinking anything original!"

And you?

What breakthrough might you experience by quieting your inner thoughts and becoming still inside? You will never know until you try.

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