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Don't Hide Behind the Curtain — To be Heard, You Must Speak

By Anjella Warnshuis
UCF Forum columnist
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(Photo by Monica Silvestre at pexels)

When I was younger, I was always told: “Children are to be seen and not heard.” “If you have time talk then you’re not working hard enough.” “No talking during study time.”

My parents and teachers taught me the importance of working hard and being silent. I talked so little that people sometimes forgot that I was there.

In time, I began to see myself as the Wizard of Oz, sans the microphone. I hid behind the curtain, furiously working to make the magic happen but I wasn’t really seen or known.

When the movie ended, how many of us remember the man behind curtain's real name? I don't recall it. I remember the loud and intimidating voice, and the larger-than-life presence that was replaced by an unremarkable wayward traveler on a hot-air balloon that no one really knew.

Without my voice, I felt invisible. I knew that I had to make changes to grow both personally and professionally. So this has been a *Year of Yes* and *The 5 Second Rule*, two self-help books about how to change your life. I sought to push my boundaries — and the universe provided.

It can be easy to overlook many of the ripples we leave in the real world. They often tend to be subtle: the warm glow someone feels after talking to another, the contagious smile that is passed along, a thought seed that is planted in someone's life that may bear fruit months or years later.

But this year the universe decided to stop being subtle. First, I received an award in my college, then I was nominated for an award at the university level, I was asked to write a piece for an international blog, and then I received a strange email.

Maybe this invisible woman wasn't so invisible after all. The email detailed some of my accomplishments and interests both in and out of work and a request to participate in writing some opinion columns. (Yes, this first one you're reading right now).

As I worked to wrap my mind around the new realization that maybe more people than I ever imagined must have seen and heard what I've been saying, I received a postcard from my alma mater, the University of West Florida, congratulating me on being selected to join the chorus of voices known as the UCF Forum. How did all this happen?

I spent many years feeling unheard and unseen. I hid behind my abilities, waiting for others to notice and open doors.

The worst part was later realizing my biggest obstacle had been myself. In order to be heard, you must speak.

The worst part was later realizing my biggest obstacle had been myself. In order to be heard, you must speak.

So I've started talking.

At times I am too truthful and share more than I should because I've been holding it in too long. Sometimes my voice may falter and tears may fall, and yet I continue to speak. As I work to be bolder, I become more conscious of not only when and how I use my voice but how others use theirs, as well.

It's a rather odd feeling when Big Brother contacts you to let you know he is watching and listening. It definitely gave me pause but as much as I advocate for servant leadership, a leader cannot always be down in the trenches laboring silently.

A leader has to be seen and heard, which is not always a safe or comfortable thing to do. They also have to provide opportunities for those who follow so they, too, can be seen and heard.

All voices have value and when we allow the space and freedom for people to have their truth heard and acknowledged, beautiful things can happen.

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