

# Quest

e-newsletter

Information, insight and inspiration for your quest

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## This issue

### Speaking up for Yourself:

- Factors that keep us silent
- Shifting from reactive to proactive
- Communicating with confidence

## LIFE MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

### Speaking up for Yourself

Most of us think we do an adequate job of speaking up for ourselves - that is until we're faced with a situation like discussing a raise with the boss, asking for clarification from our physician, or confronting our hair stylist about an unsatisfactory cut. For many of us, our brain goes into overdrive and we can't collect our thoughts, let alone communicate them.

“Speaking up for yourself involves **being specific** about what you want and **having the courage** to ask for it.”

When we fail to communicate what we want, we can feel powerless, frustrated, and dissatisfied. In the workplace, it can undermine your credibility and ultimately hinder your career. No one wants to be seen as a “door mat,” but if you continually fail to speak up for yourself, you run the risk of earning the title.

Apprehension is often at the root of our decision to be silent. Some of these reasons include the fear of:

- offending or disappointing others
- damaging the relationship or burning a bridge
- dealing with confrontation
- being labeled “aggressive” or not a team player
- being rejected or simply not liked

Other factors that can keep us from standing up for ourselves include:

- lack of confidence (feeling intimidated by those in authority)
- low self-esteem
- loss for words
- overwhelming emotion (e.g. anger, shock, hurt)
- wishful thinking (e.g. the problem will disappear by itself, it won't happen again)

If you recognize yourself in one or more of the above scenarios, here are some strategies you can use to get your voice heard.

**Know what you want** – If you haven't thought about it lately, start now and be specific. Think about every aspect of your life (e.g. health, spirituality, family, friendships, career, home, recreation, self-image) and determine what you want to accomplish and/or experience. Too often we allow others to decide “the details of life” for us and initially it may seem like a good option. However, over time we can become dissatisfied with these choices, and resentment can surface. We can also fall into “the other person comes first” trap, believing that we should ignore what we want and cater to the wants and needs of others. Getting in the habit of deciding what you want is not selfish, but healthy. However, deciding what you want is only the first step. And it doesn't guarantee you'll always get what you want, but it's a good place to start.

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**Acknowledge your feelings** – When we’re faced with people or situations that make us feel uncomfortable, we are less likely to speak up for ourselves. Everyone has some type of situation that can be especially challenging. It may be talking to your boss about your workload, dealing with a rude sales person or discussing finances with your spouse. It’s always best to acknowledge your feelings – the good, bad and the ugly. Feelings of anger, disappointment and fear are just as valid as feelings of calm, satisfaction and confidence. Because our feelings can sometimes be intense, we may need a “cooling off” period to process our feelings and sort out our thoughts. When we acknowledge our true feelings, we gain greater insight about ourselves and enhance our ability to communicate honestly.

**Be proactive** – Whenever possible, avoid waiting until a situation reaches a critical point to take action. Here are some steps that can help you move from reactive to proactive.

- **Schedule a time to talk** — Be sure to communicate the goal or reason for the conversation (e.g. balance current workload, discuss services for upcoming hair appointment, make decisions about the household budget). Avoid getting lured into talking about it before the scheduled time - unless you’re ready.
- **Consider what you want to say** — Writing it down can help you sort out your thoughts and feelings. Be as specific as possible about the situation and what you want. Stay away from personal-attack comments. Focus on facts, behaviors and how you feel. Using “I” language keeps the responsibility for your feelings on yourself, and allows you to clearly express what you want. (See Figure 1)
- **Practice** — Read your notes out loud. Listen to your voice and the words. Your comments should be direct, clear, respectful, and as brief as possible.

Some situations don’t allow the luxury of planning ahead. In these cases, you may want to limit what you say and consider following up with the individual at a later time. You can also talk yourself through the situation by saying, “Let’s take a look at what’s happened.” This will help you review the situation, gain some insight, organize your thoughts and evaluate your feelings quickly.

“I” Language	“You” Language
“I was disappointed when you ...”	“You really know how to ...”
“I need some clarification on ...”	“You never ...”
“I get angry when you ...”	“You make me so ...”
“I’m not comfortable with ...”	“You are so ...”
“I understood you to say ...”	“You said ...”
“I don’t think what you did was ...”	“You sure have a way of ...”
“I didn’t appreciate it when you ...”	“You should know ...”
“I become very distracted when ...”	“You always ...”
“I would appreciate if you would ...”	“You can’t ...”

**Figure 1** - When you use “I” language, you take responsibility for your own feelings. In addition, you can more clearly state your wants and needs. “You” language can have an accusing tone. You also run the risk of the receiver seeing your message as a personal attack.

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**Communicate with confidence** - When it comes time for your scheduled appointment, remember these tips:

- Be decisive and avoid apologizing for your feelings or for what you want
- Maintain good eye contact and open posture
- Avoid becoming hostile or sarcastic
- Give the other person an opportunity to talk
- Listen carefully and take notes if appropriate
- Ask for clarification when needed
- Keep the lines of communication open for future dialogue

It would be wonderful if the world could read our minds and deliver the salary increases of our dreams, the answers to all our medical concerns and the perfect haircut. But it can't. Speaking up for yourself involves being specific about what you want and having the courage to ask for it. Each of us is responsible for expressing to the world our own wants and needs.



Jennifer is a professional speaker, author and president of CommuniQuest, Inc. Through her seminars and keynotes, she delivers fresh insight and proven techniques on how to work smarter and live a more satisfying life. For more information on her workplace strategies and inspirational programs, visit [www.communiquet.com](http://www.communiquet.com) or call 1-888-866-0821.

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