

QC0072 - Speak Now or Struggle Later

Often, I have people in my office telling me about how someone said or did something that hurt or offended them. Yet, when I ask if they told this person they were hurt or offended, they typically lower their head and say, “No.”

As a result of not saying anything, their hurt and resentment gradually builds. The rift between them and the other person gets bigger. And their hurt begins to leak out in more and more situations.

Why don't we speak up when we've been hurt? What is it that leads us to keep it to ourselves when we've been offended? We tell our children, “Use your words,” but we often have trouble taking that advice ourselves.

REASONS WE DON'T SPEAK UP

There can be many reasons why we don't speak up when we've been hurt, offended, or angered.

We lack self-confidence.

When you lack self-confidence or have low-self-esteem, you don't have the ego strength to stand up for yourself. You can doubt your thoughts, your feelings, or even your own intentions. Consequently you don't speak up for yourself when you've been hurt or offended, because you assume you're wrong or it doesn't really matter.

We judge by prior history.

If you've tried to speak up for yourself in the past but were consistently ignored, told you were wrong, on the receiving end of the other person's anger, Then you will be very hesitant to speak up for yourself now, because you will assume that history will repeat itself.

We fear our response.

If you have a history of blowing up or saying things you shouldn't when you speak up, then you may be afraid of speaking up, because you're afraid of doing damage and hurting the person or the relationship.

We fear their response.

And if you have a history of being on the receiving end of someone's anger when you've tried to speak up, then you may find yourself thinking something like, "I would love to talk to them, but it will just make them mad and I don't want to deal with that."

REASONS TO SPEAK UP

But despite the reasons we don't speak up, there are some really good reasons to go ahead and speak up...especially if someone has hurt or offended you.

it promotes honesty.

When you speak up, you're being honest. And no relationship can survive, let alone thrive, without honesty. Even difficult honesty helps to breed trust and respect. And honesty is an important part of setting boundaries in a relationship. Honesty may seem to make things worse at times, but you can't get to better without honesty.

It keeps things from festering.

Speaking up keeps things from building up emotionally. The less you speak up, the more things stack up inside. And this then colors your thoughts, emotions, and perceptions in the relationship. Not speaking up is like continuing to walk with a rock in your shoe. If you don't learn to speak up, the limp will just get worse and worse.

It creates an environment for solutions.

You can't fix something in a relationship if you can't talk about it. There has to be mutual honesty and understanding before you can find a solution that will work for both people. Not speaking up insures that the problem will continue...and possibly get worse.

HOW TO SPEAK UP

So we've talked about some reasons why we don't speak up, and we've talked about some reasons why we need to speak up. But how can you best speak up; especially if you know it could be difficult?

Maybe you're a person who has difficulty with hard conversations, so you avoid them and things get worse. Or maybe you're a person who has no trouble wading into hard conversations, but when you're done you've left everyone bruised and broken.

Here are some steps you can take to best speak up and speak into difficult conversations.

- **Speak When you can control your words.** If you're the type of person who has trouble controlling your words or your emotions when you speak up, then don't speak up until you know you can control yourself. And if you're speaking and find yourself getting out of control, then table the conversation and come back to it when you're more in control.
- **Speak kindly but truthfully.** There's a passage of Scripture (Ephesians 4:15) that tells us to speak the truth in love. You need to do both. Speak lovingly so they can hear you, but speak truthfully so things can be addressed.
- **Speak earlier rather than later.** The longer you sit on something that's bothering you, the more you stew on it and the worse it gets. Then when you do bring it up to address it, your emotions and reactions are fired up. When you address things, in the moment when they occur, the emotional volatility is very low and you can deal with things more matter-of-factly.
- **Speak when you can best be heard.** Try not to speak up to someone who is already tired, frustrated, upset, or angry. Chances are neither of you will get anywhere. Instead, try to pick a time when they're more calm and open. And try to do that as soon as you can, so the issue you want to address hasn't already gone cold in their mind.
- **Speak to your contributions as well as their's.** If you've contributed to the issue you want to address, lead the conversation with your contributions to the problem. You may even want to ask them to forgive you for those things. This will set a much better tone and help them be more open to what you have to say.
- **Speak consistently.** What I mean by this is consistently take this approach; even when it seems to be getting you nowhere. Don't try it for a while and then give up. That just teaches the other person that if they wait long enough, you'll go back to dropping things and they won't have

to deal with it. Continue to speak up until the two of you can come to some sort of consensus and agreement.

A FINAL WORD...

Or more like a final disclaimer...doing these things doesn't mean that the conversations won't be difficult or that things will go according to your desire. It takes a lot of practice to break old habits. But keep at it.

Following these suggestions will give you the best long-term probability for both softening and improving things and for giving you a loving voice that can be heard. So, learn to SPEAK UP!