



Feeding Your Inner Wolf

by JUDY BERANGER

There is a Cherokee parable about two wolves that live inside each of us. One takes energy while the other gives energy. The one that takes energy is called fear, jealousy, regret, rumor, gossip, arrogance, anger, sorrow, self-pity, and resentment. The one that gives energy is called caring, patience, respect, compassion, generosity, empathy, love, hope, faith and joy. The story goes that on a daily basis, there is a battle raging inside each of us between these two wolves. Which wolf wins the battle? The answer is determined by each of us in our decision as to which one we choose to feed. Do you feed it knowingly or does its nourishment come from something deeper inside? The beginning answer to these questions can be uncovered when life becomes challenging. Do we respond by “tightening” up and sinking into hostility and despair or by “lightening” up and moving forward to do the best we can in a difficult situation.

A recent study, *Discovering What Matters: Balancing Money, Medicine and Meaning*, reported that having purpose in one’s life is still considered most important by people, even during these difficult economic times. We want our lives to count! As teachers, we are well positioned to make a difference in the world by our potential to impact profoundly on the lives of our students and colleagues. We are at our best when we are mindful and deliberate in our actions and reactions. Many of us treasure fond memories involving a caring teacher or colleague who touched our lives in positive ways. Unfortunately, many of us can also identify teachers or colleagues whom we disliked with equal enthusiasm! Teachers are great role models for students for many reasons but especially for the truly important things like patience, dignity, respect and caring. For the most part they are love based, not fear based. It comes through no matter what subject is being taught. We never forget the ones who valued us. Have you ever heard anyone say they are sick and tired of feeling valued and appreciated?

At a very early age there is a sense, unconscious though it may be, that we can choose how we think most of the time. For example, two little boys were playing marbles together when a little girl walked by.

One little guy stopped and said to his pal, “Boy, when I stop hating girls, she’s the one I’m going to stop hating first!” The reality is that as teachers, working with hundreds of children on a daily basis, we are faced with very difficult situations where it seems that the only choice we have is how we choose to think and react. Our choice in that exact moment is the secret to choosing success and choosing life-giving patterns or choosing to go places that drain our vital energy. For many this is a natural gift; others develop it over years with patience and learning. It is easy to give our best when all is in good order; the real challenge is to do so when things are tough.

If you could change three things about your life, what would they be?

In deciding upon an answer, it is important to only give energy to setting goals that will help change something we are able and willing to change. It’s definitely a waste of energy to want change that depends on someone else or something else. The only person I can change is “me” – I can change how I think, how I act and how I react. I cannot change these things in someone else and, if I try, will only serve to feed the energy-draining wolf! It’s not so much that we’re afraid of change or so in love with the old ways, but it is that place in between where fear creeps. It’s Linus when his blanket is in the dryer – there’s nothing to hold on to when his sense of security is gone.

There are so many behaviors that can grow energy while other behaviors drain our life energy. Imagine how much energy it takes to keep things bottled up – hoping they will go away. The result of bottling things up rather than dealing with them, eventually displays itself as depression, anger, sadness – you know the drill. The anger wolf presents itself once again.

How can I grow my energy and heighten my quality of life?

A few of the many guiding principles that might help include:

- *Self Assessment* – Review your values, beliefs, interests, abilities, skills, esteem levels, personal characteristics, choice of career, transferable skills,

self-management skills, time management skills etc. Examine your lifestyle presently, determine if it is where you want it to be, and decide how you would like it to be in the future.

- *Attitude* – can be an infectious condition whether good or bad. Attitude can be the secret of feeling good. It not only supports healing in the body but also helps in maintaining a healthy brain and body while boosting self-esteem. Most outcomes are not determined by what happens to us but rather how we react to what happens to us.

- *Movement* – is very necessary for energy flow. Purposeful movement enables us to improve our physical and emotional sense of well-being. It can soften our resistance to change, provide grounding, manage pain, and enhance the performance of all body systems. Just stop for a moment to stretch or breathe or exercise – do it! Think about how it feels after a brisk walk or some other physical activity enhanced by a healthy diet. As Emerson so aptly put it, “the first wealth is health.”

- *Change* – Welcome change both professionally and personally. It is one definite and consistent occurrence in our lives and will always happen whether we choose to adapt to it or not.

- *Passion Assessment* – passion fuels energy. If we don't have it at the moment we can seek out models for passion in families, schools, communities, as well as ourselves in past times when we were energized about something. Research passion in your family history. My father had a severe, debilitating stroke two years ago – yet he feels very blessed to still have his mind, his voice, and the use of his left hand! This has taught me more about passion and attitude, and how beneficial it is, than any other single occurrence.

- *Humor* – humor as a developed skill is not the kind that pokes fun at another or makes them a target. It is the kind that helps us take ourselves and the situation lightly. When the going gets tough the tough hang loose. Research shows that children laugh 200 times a day and adults laugh 10 times a day. We can learn lots about humor and enthusiasm from children.

- *Feedback* – Get feedback from friends, family, colleagues, supervisors and non-verbal communication. The latter can be very powerful feedback and is readily available, if you stop to notice. Solicit feedback only if you are prepared to receive the answer in the spirit in which it was requested. We need to ask in

the way porcupines make love – very carefully – as sometimes we may not like what we hear.

- *Setting goals* – The best way to predict the future is to create it by setting realistic and achievable goals, visualizing them, giving them time lines, developing strategies to implement them, and evaluating them so the process continues. We all need a map to know where we are going.

The five-day challenge – when energy is low

Is your energy down a quart? Are you ready to make a change, to put into action a conscious, deliberate strategy that is guaranteed to have a positive impact on your energy level? Give the following a try!

Five-Day Challenge – Do your utmost to go five days without saying anything negative about another person. You may not be able to prevent negative thoughts from forming but if you are willing to make the personal commitment you can: 1) catch the thought; 2) stop the thought (deep breathing really helps with this); and, 3) replace the thought. You can refuse to put the thought into words. If you mess up just start again and keep restarting, stopping and starting over until the five straight days are complete. You will be amazed at how much energy this will free up to do other things. Doing it with others, at home and in school with other teachers, will go a long way in changing patterns, creating humor and laughter, and freeing energy flow.

There is an old parable that tells of how the spirit of the plague passed an old man sitting under a tree. The old man asked the spirit where he was going. The spirit answered that he was going to the nearest city to kill one hundred people. As time passed the old man heard that ten thousand people had died in that city. When the spirit of the plague passed again on its return journey the old man challenged him and told the spirit that it lied because it said it would only take one hundred victims. The spirit replied: “I killed one hundred, FEAR took the rest.”

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