

Power & Presence

Winter 2004

Ideas and inspiration on conflict, communication and creating the life you want

Life Is What You Make It

My Aunt Mimi is a teacher, mentor, second mother, and bright spirit in my life. By her side I learned knitting, sewing, the social graces and much more. I learned how to flow with what life offers. Looking back, I see my 12-year old self working the pedal of Mimi's old, black Singer sewing machine. She's beside me, watching approvingly and giving gentle hints. In another scene I'm having a manicure, Mimi delicately filing each nail.

Then it's Christmas Eve at my grandparents' house – Mimi lives with them – and I'm opening a present from her. It's a "handmade by Mimi" poodle skirt with a beautiful cutout design. All the girl cousins get one, and we immediately put them on and start twirling. Another Christmas, Mimi's gift is full-length red flannel nightgowns with white lace at the collar and white buttons down the front that will keep us warm until we outgrow them. One year she sews tiny perfect red-checked dresses and white crinoline pinafores for our 6-inch Madame Alexander dolls.

Life Lessons

Mimi took us places – the movies, walks, shopping on Lake Street. A bunch of cousins would pile into her car and she'd drive us to Play Land – an amusement park where we would ride the Ferris wheel and eat cotton candy while she looked on.

She helped me pick out my first mini-skirt and then stood by when my father hit the roof. It was the first time in my life that I was able to express what I was feeling to my dad, because Mimi said, "Go ahead, Judy, talk to your father. What do you want to say?"

What I haven't said is that Mimi has lived most of her life in a wheelchair. At 13, she was a normal teenager who played the piano, sang, took ballet class and was active in school plays. The third of five children and the daughter of Greek immigrant parents, she got top grades, had lots of friends, good health and high spirits.

When she began to experience pain in her back, physicians couldn't find the cause. In 1934, diagnostic science was not the art it is today. Time went by and the pain grew worse. Treatments included massage, ultra-violet ray therapy and pain medication that did little to help. Gradually she lost feeling in her legs. Paralysis began to spread. Finally, after three weeks a specialist was called to the house, and she was rushed to the hospital. The diagnosis was transverse myelitis with epidural abscess. Two surgeries, a blood transfusion, and 18 days of hospitalization later, Mimi had lost the use of her lower body. Perhaps with today's knowledge an accurate diagnosis could have been made sooner and the abscess removed before it partially severed the spinal cord. As it was Mimi would be paralyzed for the rest of her life, though the medical consensus was that she would not last the year.

My grandmother set about nursing my aunt back to health. In spite of the ordeal and bleak prognosis, with the love and care of family and friends and her own positive outlook, her body healed. Her spirit never faltered. People who knew her then say she spent

months in bed but always had a smile for visitors. Some 70 years later, Mary Metskas is listed in medical record books as one of the longest-lived wheelchair-bound patients who still enjoy excellent health and physical coordination.

Constructing Meaning

So what is this story about – a wonderful woman, a bad break, the power of love and clear vision? Yes, but what else? Why does my aunt come to mind nearly every day? What does she represent, and how do I live a happier life because of her story?

I never saw Mimi as handicapped, probably because she never saw herself that way. She lived life as if there were no impediments. She learned to deliver herself in and out of her wheelchair, move the chair up and down short flights of stairs, and drive a car well into her 70's (she was one of the first to own a car with hand controls). She created beautiful handwork and had a business for many years sewing costumes for a Chicago-based theatre company.

There are days when I'm inclined to feel sorry for myself (I know, stop the presses). I become anxious about a challenge or troubled by conflict, work, or illness. And I see Mimi and the grace she displayed in meeting a challenge I can only imagine. In the face of one of life's ultimate "bad breaks," she is a warrior. I know she doesn't think of herself that way. I don't imagine she thinks she has done anything out of the ordinary. Yet everyone who knows her will say the same thing. This is an extraordinary human being. Why didn't she give up at 13? How does she still do it – get up every morning, smile at life and continue to amaze us?

At 83, she recently moved to an assisted living residence. The home that she lived in for more than 50 years, with all its comforting memories, has been sold. When I asked her how she felt about this unexpected life change, she said that it was difficult and that she was not sure what lay beyond this new bend in the road. Yet she thought it seemed the right thing to do. Mimi brings a strong center to life. With what she is given, she constructs the meaning that is most useful. As she so often told me, "Judy, life is what you make it." Without fanfare or stress, she lives these words every day.

In *The Magic of Conflict*, Tom Crum says, "Our quality of life depends not on what happens to us, but on what we do with what happens to us." Philip Simmons, who lived with Lou Gehrig's disease for many years, writes in his book *Learning to Fall*, "Life throws things at us that we cannot predict and cannot control. What we can control is who we are along the way." It is impossible to predict what each new day will offer, let alone a brand new year. We do, however, make daily choices in how we receive each offering – as a burden or a gift. Mimi taught me to look for the gift, and for that I am very grateful.

inspiration

"Hope" is the thing with feathers – That perches in the soul – And sings the tune without the words – And never stops – at all.

—Emily Dickinson

Conflict Management
Communication Skills
Training & Facilitation



real life

How do you center? Let's count the ways . . .
Many thanks to all who sent stories about how the aiki approach works in your life.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
 And sorry I could not travel both
 And be one traveler, long I stood
 And looked down one as far as I could
 To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
 Though having perhaps the better claim,
 Because it was grassy and wanted wear
 Though as for that the passing there
 Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
 In leaves no step had trodden black.
 Oh, I kept the first for another day!
 Yet knowing how way leads onto way,
 I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence;
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I
 I took the one less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost (1916)

The future is not a result of choice among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created ... created first in mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destination.

— John Scharr, *Loyalty in America*

From Laurie Davis, Human Resources, Maine Medical Center

I wanted to let you know that I had a difficult conversation since our class, and that it went very well for several reasons:

I reviewed all of my notes
 I used the input I received from class participants
 I received pre-conversation coaching from a co-worker
 I completed the discussion planner you gave us
 I centered myself this morning

This was one of two difficult conversations that were scheduled for today. Both went pretty much as planned thanks in large part to what you shared with us in class. Many thanks for sharing your research, experiences, and insights so generously.



JUST AS FAST AS A FISH CAN MOVE IN WATER,
 YOU CAN INSTANTLY MOVE TO A HAPPY,
 BALANCED ATTITUDE.

—Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche

From Dree Sherry, speech therapist

I went to return a music book to a store where the proprietor had told me they don't accept returned music. I remembered your column about working with a customer service person that didn't want to help. You took the approach that you and the other person could work together and find an acceptable outcome for all parties. I knew that I wanted to buy a more expensive book and hoped the proprietor would go for an exchange. She did. And I didn't even have to say anything. I think it was my mindset (center? ki?) that spoke for me. And she had the book in stock, so I returned the one I didn't want and got the one I wanted, all without a hitch. How good is that? I think I might play my numbers today.

From a friend and human resource director

I think you will appreciate how "centering" helped me on my recent vacation to Aruba. While it was 90% wonderful, there were the usual hotel/airline/scheduling issues that could have easily influenced my enjoyment. I found myself practicing "centering" several times and felt quite calm. Amazingly simple!

resources

Dialogue in Daily Life (reprinted with permission from the Public Conversations Project)

The next time differences about an important issue strain your relationship with someone in your life, you might ask yourself three questions: 1) Which of my life experiences might help this person understand "where I'm coming from" on this issue? 2) What is at the heart of the matter for me? What values, hopes, concerns and assumptions shape my perspective? and 3) Do I have any mixed feelings, value conflicts or areas of uncertainty about the matter?

Our experience is that reflecting on these questions can be illuminating for both you and others. You could try writing out your response until it captures everything that is most central for you. You then might invite the other person to ponder the same questions; you even might propose a conversation in which you simply listen respectfully to one another's responses. You might decide in advance to follow this with an exchange intended to clarify areas of confusion and/or genuine interest. While this interaction is unlikely to change either of your perspectives on the issue that divides you, it may shift your relationship in positive ways by deepening your mutual understanding.

Visit the Public Conversations Project web site at <http://www.publicconversations.org>

Portsmouth Aikido

Portsmouth Aikido is an ongoing martial arts school located at the Seacoast Family Y in Portsmouth. Many of the principles that are reflected in our workshops come from Aikido, the Japanese martial art that teaches self defense through redirection of energy. Classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 7:45 p.m. and Sundays at 1:00 and 2:15 p.m. Stop by anytime and watch a class, or visit our web site for more information.

The next **Aikido Beginner's Class** will start at the Seacoast Family Y on January 25. The six-week course will run through February 29, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. each Sunday. The cost is \$50.00 per person for the course and anyone aged 12 and older is welcome. For information or to register, please visit www.PortsmouthAikido.com.

Power & Presence Associates

Power & Presence is not just a newsletter – it's a company that provides unique training for specific needs. Whether your focus is on conflict, communication, or increasing power and presence under stress, we have associates with expertise in leadership development, strategic planning, customer service, powerful presentations and stress management. Please contact us to discuss your training needs.

workshops

(See calendar to the right for dates and times.)

Powerful Presentations

This empowering workshop for beginning to advanced presenters combines training in good vocal technique with practice in giving clear, effective, and compelling presentations. Judy Ringer and Susan Losapio team up to help participants develop a more powerful voice, enhance confidence and presence, and connect with an audience. You'll learn simple kinesthetic exercises you can practice daily and use before, during, and after presentations. You will also be guided in the Four Defining Characteristics of a Powerful Presentation and have the opportunity to deliver several brief presentations on tape. You'll receive individual coaching and have the video to review at home.

Assertive Communication & Conflict Resolution

Do you find it difficult to ask for what you want, say no, or express a difference of opinion? Most of us have been conditioned to view conflict as negative, so it may be difficult to assert our position at times. Assertive (versus aggressive or passive) communication can help create a sense of self and foster an environment that is meaningful and fulfilling. This workshop will help you express yourself with equanimity and clarity while honoring other perspectives. Co-facilitators are Judy Ringer and Tom Dubois, Ph.D. Enrollment limited to ten participants. Sponsored by the Kittery Recreation Department. Please call 207-439-3800 to register. See Calendar for date and time.



The place to improve the world
is first in one's own heart and head and hands,
and then work outward from there.

— Robert M. Pirsig

Emotional Intelligence

New!

"We are being judged by a new yardstick: not just how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other."

— Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*

Do you seek to be more effective in your personal or professional life? Do you find yourself provoked or flustered easily? The ability to utilize Emotional Intelligence is critical to interpersonal effectiveness and is a distinguishing quality of leadership at any level of the organization and from all walks of life. Distinct from, but complementary to IQ or cognitive capacity, Emotional Intelligence is the ability to communicate understanding and appreciation, to manage and motivate others, to think clearly, and to respond confidently under pressure. In this new offering from Power & Presence, you'll become better equipped to tap the resources of Emotional Intelligence and direct conflict and communication into useful outcomes through centering, discovery, relational awareness and useful dialogue skills. Co-trainers: Judy Ringer and Ann Driscoll, Ed.D.

The Magic of Conflict

Each time conflict shows up, we have the opportunity to respond with awareness. Yet so often we fight or flee. We know what we want to do, but we react before we can stop and think. The Magic of Conflict is an opportunity to become more aware of your physical, mental and emotional responses and choose the ones that foster positive outcomes. You'll learn principles from the Japanese martial art aikido and practice mind/body skills like centering, empathy, and redirection of energy. You'll use this new awareness to initiate verbal interactions that engage others in problem-solving strategies and transform difficult situations into opportunities to learn.

registration

Please reserve space for me in your upcoming workshop:

Title of Workshop: _____

Total Cost: _____ Deposit enclosed: _____ (minimum \$50)*

Name: _____ Occupation: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (day): _____ (night): _____

E-mail: _____ Fax: _____

*Full deposit refundable one week prior to workshop date.

Please tell me!

If you prefer to receive *Power & Presence* electronically, let me know:

- By phone 603-431-8560
- By email Judy@JudyRinger.com
- Online at JudyRinger.com on the Contact page.

MAIL TO: Judy Ringer • 76 Park Street • Portsmouth, NH • 03801-5031

workshop calendar

February 5 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
POWERFUL PRESENTATIONS
Tuition: \$135.00 per person
(Lunch and handouts provided)
Daniel Webster College
Pease Tradeport, Portsmouth

February 7 • 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.
**ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION AND
CONFLICT RESOLUTION**
Tuition: \$45.00 per person
Sponsored by and held at:
Kittery Recreation Department, Kittery, ME
To register: Call 207-439-3800

February 18 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
Tuition: \$135.00 per person
(Lunch and handouts included)
Location: TBA

March 17 • 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
THE MAGIC OF CONFLICT
Tuition: \$135.00 per person
(Lunch, workbook, and Magic of
Conflict text included)
Portsmouth area location TBA

**TO REGISTER:
RETURN FORM BELOW, CALL, OR EMAIL**

**Please register early.
All workshops have minimum and
maximum participant requirements.**

CUSTOMIZED PROGRAMS

The following are examples of programs designed for organizations. All trainings are tailored to meet specific goals and objectives. Please call for additional information.

CORPORATE/BUSINESS SEMINARS

- Conflict in the Workplace
- Creating a Positive Work Environment
- Team Building: Working Together Effectively
 - Assertive Communication
 - Powerful Presentations
- Difficult People: Tormentors or Teachers
 - Principled Negotiation
- Aikido and Conflict: Getting on the Mat

PROGRAMS FOR EDUCATORS

- The Magic of Conflict
- Violence: Dealing with Anger (for students)
 - Helping Students Deal with Anger and Conflict (for teachers)
- Team Building: Working Together Effectively



Judy Ringer

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inside

- *Life is What You Make It*
- *Dialogue in Daily Life*
- *Assertive Communication and Conflict Resolution*
- *Powerful Presentations*
- *Emotional Intelligence*

Warm Wishes For Connection & Peace In The New Year



quotables

“*I have been amazed how much impact that one day of working with you made for me personally. Centering is a big help to me in many situations.*”

• *This sounds melodramatic, but The Magic of Conflict was a life-changing class for me. I really liked the way the physical activities demonstrated abstract issues.*

• *This is one of the best courses we offer. I will continue to recommend it to managers throughout our organization.*

• *Clear, concise, wonderful!*”

solutions

question

I work with an administrative assistant in another department who is very difficult. I leave every exchange feeling as though it were a battle.

answer

I had a similar conflict some years ago. The person had a strong affect on me, and I would lose my center every time.

Then I thought about using the conflict as a centering practice. Whenever we met, I'd practice centering. I'd lose it quickly at first, I'd re-center, lose it again, re-center. I gradually grew more centered and, oddly enough, began to look forward to our meetings so that I could practice. We're good friends today.

There are always going to be difficult people. The question is, can you transform these situations into opportunities to increase awareness and center? When do you "lose it?" Is it when you see the person or is it just thinking about it? Is it their tone of voice, a look, an inconsistency in words or behavior? Ask yourself, is it their action, or the way you receive it? Consider that you have a choice in the way you respond, and you'll begin to take your power back.



**Conflict Management
 Communication Skills
 Training & Facilitation**

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