

THE UN-COMFORT ZONE with Robert Wilson

Defeating the De-Motivator

The sweet strains of a Puccini aria cut through the Saturday night clatter of the busy Italian restaurant in New York City, but it wasn't coming from the aging voice of the Sicilian baritone who was hired to belt out favorites like *Funiculi-Funicula*. It was a soprano whose crystal clear voice filled the room. Within moments all the ambient noise came to a halt. Diners stopped eating and talking, busboys stopped clearing tables, the cooks even came out of the kitchen.

Singing on the tiny stage was the skinny moon-faced waitress from Ohio. The Sicilian heard she studied opera, so he invited her to join him, but what began as a duet ended in solo as he too was mesmerized by the beauty of her voice. When she finished, the place thundered in applause and I saw tears of gratitude glistening in her eyes. She had hit each note perfectly.

If only she had done that when she auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera. But she choked, flinched, allowed a seed of doubt to creep into her consciousness and thus her voice.

She told me her story over a couple of beers after work. It was the fall of 1984, and I was a fellow waiter at the restaurant; just another struggling artist in the city that never sleeps. She explained that she got nervous during her audition and couldn't hit the high notes. She would get one more chance to audition, but she would have to wait an entire year.

I never found out if she made it; as a writer my art is portable and a few months later I moved to a city where they still have a bedtime. I suspect she did, because that night she received a proof - a vital beginning step.

Doubt is a silent killer. We transmit feelings of doubt to others through subtleties in our body language, facial expression and tone of voice. It is picked up subconsciously by those with whom we communicate. Worse than that, we communicate it to ourselves, and it seeps into our performance. Doubt is *the* De-Motivator and all too often it prevents us from even trying.

We all suffer doubt occasionally, and its cure is always the same: proof. Proof that we are indeed talented enough to do what we set out to do. A proof doesn't need to be big to eliminate doubt. A series of little ones can be just as effective.

I keep a journal – a log – of accomplishments. Both small and large, because they all add up to reasons for believing in my abilities. It is especially important to log the little ones, because they are so easy to forget or overlook, and yet they carry tremendous weight when it comes to giving ourselves confidence.

You say, "I'm just starting out and have no accomplishments." That just means you're not looking in the right places. We all have successes, some of them may be found in different areas of your life. I often read in the Wall Street Journal about women, who after years as stay-

at-home Moms, return to the workforce in well-paid management positions. They acquire these jobs by citing in their resumes the many skills and achievements they learned through their volunteer work. What talents are you racking up through your hobbies and leisure activities?

Sometimes proof comes to us by comparing ourselves to others. Simply ask yourself, “Out of all the people who have ever lived, how many have attained what I want?” The sheer numbers alone will often be all the proof you need.

When all else fails, fall back on faith. Some of the most successful people in the world had absolutely no proof that they could achieve their dreams. All they had was a strong desire and a belief in themselves. As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

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