

the
POWER
of
Shhh...

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This is the story of what you can accomplish just by knowing when to say “Shhh...”

On her 57th birthday in 2003, Rosie Swale-Pope stepped out the door of her home in Wales and headed east. Her intention was to run around the world, taking the hardest and coldest route possible, through Siberia and Alaska. She succeeded, finishing in the summer of 2008.

The thing that strikes you about Rosie is not just how energetic or athletic she is - both true - but especially how grateful she is. Everything seems to give her joy: the smile of a waitress, the interest of every person she meets, a simple bowl of pasta cooked in the parking lot of an auto repair shop. Rosie was running to raise money to battle cancer, a disease that took her husband's life a year before she began her run.

It's hard to imagine how deep Rosie had to dig to complete her run. Here's a post she made to her web site in January 2006 when she was alone in

Alaska, hundreds of miles east of the Bering Land Bridge:

"I am camped in the middle of the mighty Yukon River. The thermometer reads less than minus 60. But somehow you get strength when things are bad. God gives strength to warriors I am told. I am more determined than ever. I should be able to proceed at daylight to Nulato, the next village. I hope to get there in a couple of days. I know everyone (is) thinking of me and I am thinking of you all. The battery is low but everything is alright."

Rosie stated the temperature in Celsius. In Fahrenheit, it was minus 76 degrees. She was running and sleeping outside in those temperatures.

There were no trails, and no roads. She was running through the wilderness in the dead of winter.

"You have to work past your limits. I actually don't think that people have any limitations."

Rosie utterly downplays what she has achieved. "I'm just doing what I love, which is to run," she says. But as she speaks, her philosophy becomes clear. "People talk about mind over matter, and I

believe in it, but you really have to dig deep. It's not enough just to think. You have to work past your limits. I actually don't think that people have any limitations.

"Just go as hard as you can every day," urges Rosie. She says the challenges keep changing, and the only true enemy you have is yourself.

To dig deep inside, you have to do something most people find difficult. You have to take time every day to be quiet inside.

This is where Shhh... comes in. It can become a signal to you to sit still and be quiet.

Most of us live with a constant chatter going on in our heads, a stream of noise that keeps us from actually experiencing the world around us. Instead, we experience a world that is distorted by our attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, shortcomings and fears. This world is not real; you make it up everyday. This fake world sometimes tells you that there is too much pressure, that you will probably fail, that the challenge is too great. None of these statements are true.

In the real world, the one you must be silent to recognize, your possibilities are limitless.

To experience the real world, you must have the discipline and courage to be completely quiet.

You must have the courage to look deep inside you without the benefit of rationalizations or the protection of your own voice. You must quiet your mind and sit still.

To experience the real world, you must have the discipline and courage to be completely quiet.

Then what?

Then you do it again the next day, and the next. You keep doing it every day. At first, this may seem like a waste of time, but it will prove to be the best thing you ever did. Within weeks, you will come to appreciate this time for its ability to help you recharge your batteries and achieve clarity about what is really important.

Molly Hale is a person who understands the benefits of such time spent silently. In 1995, driving back from a martial arts tournament, Molly Hale broke her neck in a car accident.

"Lying in bed in the intensive care unit, hours after being extracted from my car, I remember the surreal experience of listening to the sounds of voices fading in and out: her neck is broken... we can take the pressure off the cord... paralyzed from the shoulders down... people don't come back from this."

For many months after her accident, Molly had virtually no control of her body. The things we take for granted, she could not do. Doctors were giving her little or no reason to hope. Eventually, in the tiniest ways, she began to focus on what she could control, and to play with different approaches that might result in a small bit of progress. If she could move a finger or toe on a given day, she would practice with it.

Fortunately, long before her accident Molly began practicing looking deep inside. She sat still each day. She experienced the world as it really is, and she understood that she – like all of us – has more control over her fate than it sometimes seems.

Molly put together her own training regimen that continues to this day, literally learning alternative ways to will her arms and legs to move – even though the systems that allow the rest of us to move no longer function properly in Molly's body.

In 2001, sitting in a wheelchair and also on the mat in the studio, Molly earned her third degree black belt in Aikido.

Six days a week, Molly spends two hours in a 92 degree heated therapeutic pool, in which she can now walk unaided. During this time, she is now able to playfully somersault and tumble in deep

water as she reintegrates her whole body movements.

Molly explains, "The process of recovery and stabilization after injury is not linear. I am familiar with activities that require practice, doing something over and over and over. I swam competitively and was trained to put in the time and effort to increase speed and stamina. As a martial artist practicing Aikido for eleven years at the time of my injury, I knew how to arrive at each day's training with a beginner's mind, looking for what was new in a technique I had been studying for years, seeking freshness. The process of learning to be comfortable with the plateaus - the times when my art seemed to be stagnant or even going backwards - has proved to be a great asset as I faced my spinal cord injury."

Practicing the power of Shhh... does not mean living the life of a monk and withdrawing from the world. In fact, digging deep can bring you closer to others. When Molly practices deep breathing while riding on a public bus, her intention is not simply to relax herself, it is to relax everyone on the bus. Why? "Because it's fun," admits Molly.

People like Molly and Rosie, who have the ability to be calm and focused, to clear their mind of all distractions when necessary, demonstrate to all of us what we are capable of achieving. This is not an ability reserved for a handful of over-achievers. It

is available to anyone willing to pay the price of admission. That price is taking time each day to turn off your internal commentary, sit still, and experience the world without a screen of your own thoughts, fears, ambitions and beliefs.

Shhh...

Words can't express what you will discover. But you can expect a few changes that are easy to describe.

Anyone can be calm and focused. You just have to be willing to pay the price of admission.

With practice and patience, you will realize your potential is much greater than you once thought. You will find the energy and determination to create the life you really want to live.

No matter your position in life, your religion, your nationality or your age, the secret to digging really deep is the same: take time to be quiet. It truly is a one-size-fits-all solution.

Shhh... does not require money. You do not need an instructor, special clothes, or a fancy gym. It does require a bit of time, but even the busiest person can find the time for something that will help him or her make better decisions, stay calm

in the face of previously overwhelming pressures, and see the world with clarity and insight.

Since this is a new practice for most people, here are a few hints to help you get started.

Pick a place in which you won't be disturbed, and tell the people around you to give you this time alone.

Give yourself a specific amount of time, say, 30 minutes. Give yourself permission to set aside all your responsibilities for this period of time.

For 30 minutes or so, give yourself permission to set aside all responsibilities.

Close your eyes. Just by doing this, your brainwaves change.

Take a deep breath, and as you let it out softly say "Shhhhhhhh," just as you might to quiet a baby.

Do this again and again, until you feel comfortable just sitting in silence. Let everything around you disappear... all pressures and obligations. Just sit quietly.

Don't have any expectations. The benefits aren't always obvious during this time; they often only become obvious later, when you are back to your normal daily routine.

The power of Shhh is in its simplicity. It's not that you have to do something; it's that you give yourself permission to do nothing, to merely clear your mind and become aware of the tremendous energy you have inside you.

If this seems like a very personal subject that has no connection to the people around you or the organizations and community groups with which you work, think again. The way you view the world determines how the world reacts to you. As world events teach us time and time again, our fates are linked together.

Calm, focused energy benefits us all. Achieving such a state is both a personal challenge and a collective one. Each in our own way has a responsibility to give life our best.

Give it a try. It works.



By Jim George and Bruce Kasanoff

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