

The Energy of Advocating

“If I hadn’t finally gotten angry, I never would have been able to change the situation for the better!”

or

“If only I hadn’t been so angry, I never would have said what I said...now I’ve ruined everything and closed that door forever.”

Anger, or any emotion- your ally or your foe when advocating?

When we are advocating for someone else, we are usually asking for something such as a service or support, that rights be respected, a wrong be rectified, or suggesting a new way of doing things for those we are supporting. It can feel like a lot of pressure and emotions can run high. We do our homework by gathering information and facts and preparing what questions we need to ask, but when we meet those decision makers face to face and reflect later on the meeting, it can seem that there was an invisible dynamic at play that made the difference between whether the encounter moved forward or backward. By examining this dynamic we can learn how to take care of our emotions and their accompanying energies to be the strong advocates those we support need us to be.

I hear similar statements to the quotes above fairly frequently, both in my practice and in my personal life. Sometimes I hear them from my clients, sometimes from friends and acquaintances, and sometimes I have to admit, from myself.

My passion for this stems from my own experiences as an advocate. I am the proud Mom of a wonderful 20-year-old young man who has Down syndrome as well as a number of medical challenges. For twelve of his early years, as a member of the sandwich generation I also found myself advocating not only for him but for my father whose life had taken an unexpected challenging turn leaving him compromised in his ability to obtain the supports he needed.

In my private practice I help people who are living the advocate or supporter’s role, with issues in their personal life that are getting in the way of them experiencing feelings of happiness and self-empowerment. Advocates or those supporting others can often feel overwhelmed, frustrated with the system, or that there is no place in their own life for themselves. In our sessions, clients often share the successes and frustrations they encounter while advocating, and along with my own experiences I have noticed how much of an impact the emotions that we bring into advocating can influence the quality of change we are capable of creating.

What’s going on with these emotions and their energies?

As the two quotes above show, sometimes the same emotion and the energy that goes with it can be the best thing to help you and sometimes the worst. Being aware of what is actually going on inside you and what energy you are holding and therefore projecting, (no matter how good an actor you are) and the effects it can have, is key.

When advocating, there are some things we have control over, things we can influence and things that are out of our control. What we have control over is what is going on with ourselves: what is

going on with our energy, emotions, and of course, the preparation we do for each advocating opportunity. We can influence, in a positive way, how we will be received and heard by others. Once we have done the best we can, often the actual decision, and the services, supports or funds available are out of our control.

Determining if an emotion is good or bad depends on what energy and emotion you have been predominantly operating from. Although there are different emotional scales, I often refer to the Map of Consciousness® from David Hawkins’ book, Power vs. Force ¹. I’ve included an adaptation of the scale here. Let’s use it to look at the story of two parents.

Level of consciousness	Energy level(log)	Emotions or symptoms	
Enlightenment	700-1000	Ineffable	Power
Peace	600	Bliss	Power
Joy	540	Serenity	Power
Love	500	Reverence	Power
Reason	400	Understanding	Power
Acceptance	350	Forgiveness, Curious	Power
Willingness	310	Optimism, Hope	Power
Neutrality	250	Trust, Safety	Power
Courage	200	Affirmation, Aware	Power
Pride	175	Scorn	Force
Anger	150	Hate, Inflamed	Force
Desire	125	Craving, Demanding	Force
Fear	100	Anxiety, Overwhelmed	Force
Grief	75	Regret, Lonely	Force
Apathy	50	Despair, Hopeless	Force
Guilt	30	Blame	Force
Shame	20	Humiliation	Force

The first quote, the one celebrating anger, was from a parent who was previously in a state of despair. From the scale we can see that despair is a low energy place to be. She often felt that she and her child were victims of an unfortunate situation and she was helpless to change it. One evening she attended a meeting of parents of children with special needs. As she heard parent after parent talking about the gains they had advocated for and their successes she became angrier and angrier. The next morning, before she lost this energy, she went to the school administration and made a forceful case for some supports she truly believed her child needed and deserved, and things changed for the better. In this parent’s case, anger was a real step up in the scale from where she had been and got her better results than what she had been experiencing.

The parent in the second quote had been successful many times in advocating for her child,

often approaching each meeting with a sense of awareness, optimism and reason. At the meeting in question, some uncomplimentary things were said about her child and she found herself angry and before she knew it she “hit back” with some uncomplimentary barbs of her own vaguely aimed at the speaker. The meeting quickly went downhill, no forward positive actions came from it and future possibilities looked dim. In this case, anger was a real step down in the scale and brought worse results than she was used to.

Authenticity

You may be thinking: *“But Shirley, I am truly angry or fearful at times. Does that mean I should act like I am higher on this scale even when I am not actually feeling that way?”*

The energy we project tells a lot about what is going on with us and will influence others no matter how good an acting job we do. Have you ever felt confused around someone who on the outside had the appearance of a calm and happy person yet for some reason you end up feeling unnerved and anxious? Have you dealt with someone who is smiling and saying complimentary or positive things but you find yourself feeling defensive and angry? Two things could be going on here. One, which we will look at in a moment, is your own filter that you are using to receive the information. The other is that these people could be doing exactly what was just asked about: trying to act in a more positive manner than they are feeling. While you are getting one message from how they are acting, you are getting another message from their energy.

Great acting ability or not, each emotion has characteristics that will play a role in your energy. In fear, the world seems like an unsafe place and whether you are smiling or not, others will pick up at some level that you feel threatened. In fear, no matter how you are acting, your receiving filter may interpret some benign statements to be threats to your well-being or that of the person you are supporting. In anger, the feelings of aggression, hostility, judgments and the need to “win” may be perceived by the person you are dealing with and cause them to become defensive and stop being helpful. In anger, your receiving filter may totally miss a positive productive suggestion of the other person, as your anger and judgment may have set you up to hear everything they say as wrong or harmful. Alternatively, on the positive side, you may have had the experience of dealing with someone who truly is compassionate, understanding and optimistic but for some reason, perhaps as part of their job, they try to portray the persona of a stern unforgiving person. Something tells you that underneath the posturing, their energy indicates a positive solution has a chance here and it can help raise your own energy to a more positive level.

With that in mind you may now be wondering: *If you are recommending being authentic with my emotions, what do I do if I have an emotion that I suspect will sabotage my advocating opportunity?*

First, pay attention to how you are feeling. When you are aware, you can acknowledge how you are feeling and attempt to do something to change it if you want to. It just might change the outcome.

There are many techniques that can help you to clear, learn from and release emotions that are not serving you well, allowing you to move into a place that has the potential to produce something more positive. If I recognize the danger signals ahead of time, I like to use a technique that I use often in my practice, Emotional Freedom Techniques (or EFT). A mind-body technique that uses meridian tapping, EFT can bring you the educational “aha” moments and allow you to move through the troubling emotions and on to ones that are more honouring to you

and those you interact with. A recent story in my own life is a good example of how taking care of emotional and energetic health can stop self-sabotage in its tracks.

I had just received a call to set up an appointment to review an application for a program that I wished my son to be a part of. The first sentence uttered by the person at the end of the line along with the tone of voice used, led me to jump to the conclusion that somehow I had offended them in my previous voice messages. I was already carrying a little fear about my son's situation and right away I interpreted a negative meaning where actually the words had not been so. (I had left three messages, and was being told that one message would have been sufficient.) Trying to do damage control from my fear-based position, I put on a forced pleasant voice (acting) and tried to explain my reason for so many messages. Things went from bad to worse. Next thing I knew, a review of my son's eligibility for a program that he was already a part of was going to be included in the appointment as well. Supposedly it needed to be reviewed every few years, but I had never heard of that. My fear convinced me this person was out to get us and the fact that my actions may have caused this was adding guilt to the mix. (Check the scale...I was sinking fast.) When I hung up, I felt pretty low. We were doomed, I was sure.

So I started tapping. (This article is not intended to be a how-to for tapping, but more to illustrate a process for shifting through negativity and moving up to something more productive and positive. References are given at the end of the article for where to search out more information.) I tapped on the worst case scenario: we were doomed, he was to lose all outside supports and it was all my fault. Tapping can quickly move out the debris that clogs and clouds our perspectives and it wasn't long before I realized that actually, from the information I had had, I had done the best I could and after tapping, when I reviewed what had transpired in the call, I saw that there was no real truth to "We're doomed", it was just a remote possibility. Moving up to fear again. I started tapping on all the fear based things that were running through my mind, such as "Maybe this person has a quota of people they have to remove from the program and we brought attention to ourselves at the wrong time!" and as many other fear based assumptions that my mind could dream up. Soon the fear started to dissipate and I started to become angry at the fact that if any of my imaginings were true, they were horribly unfair. I actually was feeling much better and energized because, as you can see on the scale, anger has more energy and is a significant move towards positive from guilt and fear. I was ready! "Mama Bear" was going into battle! Thankfully, experience told me that if I remained here I just might single-handedly, albeit energetically and with flourish, ruin my son's future with a not too well thought out pointed remark that I would regret later.

Time to keep moving up. So I tapped on the unfairness of it all. When I tapped on "How dare they judge my son like that, they haven't even met him!" I barely got the words out when I started to laugh. Wasn't I doing the same thing to the person who had been at the other end of the phone line? I was able to forgive myself for this silliness and the other person for this imagined prejudice I was accusing them of in my mind. I had really shifted.

From this place of acceptance I was willing to consider the possibility that the person was just very conscientious in their job. From there I was able to prepare the materials I had been asked to bring with a lighter heart and we attended the meeting with a positive energy that was no act, it was authentic.

Turns out this person was extremely conscientious, and not only did my son stay in the existing program and get approval for the new one, they suggested additional places I might look for resources and support. I wonder what the outcome might have been if I had stayed in the fear and guilt of “We’re doomed and it’s my fault”? Even with the person being as positive as they turned out to be, my filters may have blocked out or discounted some of the good suggestions they were offering.

What about the parent who was celebrating anger in the first quote? Certainly in that particular experience anger was a constructive energy. Should she then always use anger? Although a more positive energy than despair, anger does inherently have some negative attributes that we have already referred to. None of us like to be at the receiving end of someone’s anger and I suspect if she stays there as her default advocating energy she may soon find her calls take awhile to be returned, and meetings become hard to set up, because people want to avoid a continually angry person. David Hawkins’ work suggests that it is at the level of 200 or Courage that meaningful positive change occurs, that the energy has positive power behind it rather than negative force. My hope for the parent of the first quote is that she finds a tool that works for her to move through negative emotions so she has a means to get to a more positive place when needed.

For the parent in the second quote, the anger came on as a surprise in the middle of a meeting, and that can happen to anybody. I do find the more you take the time to take care of yourself before the situation the less likely you are to be triggered by events. The second parent admitted that in this case, while she had prepared her list of concerns and questions, she had not paid any attention to what emotions she was feeling before the meeting. There are some on-the-spot ‘emergency’ calming exercises we can do if we have the presence of mind to do them when it is not practical to tap. They will be the subject of a future article.

Being aware of how you are feeling and then choosing to take care of yourself is like physical fitness. The more we exercise our physical muscles the better shape we are in and the more able we are to take on activities that are difficult when we are unfit. Take the time to take care of your emotional and energetic health, exercise that “muscle”, it will get stronger and you will become more resilient to what life throws your way. The person you support will have a strong advocate and you will find more enjoyment and satisfaction in all you do.

*By Shirley Mather
EFT Advanced Practitioner- AAMET International
Certified Matrix Reimprinting Practitioner*

Interested in learning more about Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT)?

While EFT is useful in dealing with daily issues as referred to in this article, it is particularly effective in resolving long standing and deep rooted issues that are holding you back from living life to the fullest.

- If you are interested in working with a practitioner please contact Shirley for a complimentary 30 minute consultation at shirley@learningspirit.ca or through the contact tab on her website : <http://www.learningspiritenergy.com/>
- If you are interested in EFT training, please visit <http://www.NEForrester.com/>
- If you are interested in finding out more on your own, you will find quality tutorials on Gary Craig's website <http://www.emofree.com/> and with EFT Universe at <http://www.eftuniverse.com/> .

¹Hawkins, D.R.(2012 original pub. 1995). *Power vs. force: The hidden determinants of human behavior*. United States, Hay House, Inc.