

## Courageous Conversations

I've never been big on new-year resolutions, but have always enjoyed end/beginning of the year reflection. In my own personal and professional life, 2009 required me to find my own sense of courage in many conversations. The theme continues in 2010.

I currently have a family member who is living with cancer. A few months ago I was offered an opportunity to participate in an on-camera interview discussing the impact dealing with cancer has had on our family.

From the moment I got the invitation, to the moment the interview was finished, I questioned if I would really be able to use my voice in this situation. I hoped the interview would be helpful to others, but I was terrified.

First, I was afraid to talk with my family members about the opportunity. I worried that they would feel uncomfortable with me speaking so openly about a very private matter. In this circumstance, talking to my family was courageous conversation number one. The outcome – they were open, supportive, and even proud. I was grateful for their reaction, and glad I decided to open up to the idea and have the conversation.

Second, once I was clear I would do the interview; I became anxious about what I would say. I did not have the questions in advance, so I was nervous about the scope of the interview. This was my first on-camera interview and I wondered if it was foolish to discuss something so personal, publicly for the first time, without any on-camera experience. What if I burst into tears, or sounded stupid, or sounded holier than thou? Successfully completing the interview was courageous conversation number two. The outcome – well I haven't seen it yet, but everyone involved seemed pleased and I'm hoping for the best.

I think the point, not only of what I just shared but also, about using your voice, is that deep down most of us know when it is time to have a courageous conversation. The fear you may feel can be palpable and in many cases fear is reasonable. For me, whether I was going to do this interview or not, my loved ones needed to know that one way I cope is to share my story with others. It was important to do the interview so I would not feel isolated in this experience, and it might positively affect others who see it.

Not all courageous conversations lead to positive outcomes. The most important lesson I've learned about courageous communication is to learn to trust myself to know what is best. In 2009 I spent a lot of time listening, and in many cases keeping my mouth shut. I think we all have that inner voice that can guide us to think, listen, and then use our voice to speak.

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