



Silence As Strength

by Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.



For many people, silence is uncomfortable, and, in turn, unexplored. Its purpose, power, and potential associated with social interactions or business engagements remain unknown and unrealized. Unlike other forms of communication, the anatomy of silence is less popularized, its theories and models unfamiliar, and strategies and tactics unexercised. Often, we fumble using silence, stricken with the awkwardness of a child unsure of its workings or how to manage it when we're the objects of another's silence. The Taoist Philosopher Lao Tzu offers

"Silence is a source of great strength." There is a fundamental, visceral quality to this statement. It resonates across cultures and evokes similar responses in peoples worldwide. Consider the cookie jar from which you are now withdrawing your hand holding a scrumptious chocolate chip cookie. You turn to find your mother, standing straight, arms folded, and eyes fixed on your now rigor mortis infused stance. As you wait for her reaction, one characteristic of the moment emerges...the silence; a silence both deafening and interminable. Frequently, it is silence that punishes, rewards, or strengthens. As Leonardo da Vinci wrote "Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence." The silence strengthened your mother's authority and permeated her message.

How can silence be used powerfully and positively to build meaningful personal and productive business relationships? Let's consider the work of physician Dr. Alex Lickerman.

Silence is Power

Dr. Lickerman, author, teacher, and Buddhist informs us that from silence many *gifts* can be received. Of these gifts, chief among them are the following:

1. Effective Listening - Listening requires silence. We cannot hear others unless we resist thinking about ourselves and completely concentrate on what another is communicating. Once we stop and listen, the nuances inherent in another's message can emerge; subtleties in content, tone, and inference. Silence serves as a gateway to your understanding and their reflection.

2. Characters Traits - Silence enables effective listening to occur helping you to vacate the space existent between communicators. As another occupies this space and is increasingly comfortable to self disclose, their personal traits can emerge unfettered by questions and clarifications. Here too, a focus is on *how* something is said not necessarily *what* is said.

3. Attractiveness - Silence provides an opportunity for people to talk about themselves, their thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Constructing a listening platform for others to stand on and be heard is a valuable mechanism for enabling people to be understood, in turn empowering them to decide your relationship to them; your attractiveness.

4. Self-control - Silence sponsors relaxation and reflection. When confronted with evocative news or proactive circumstances people tend to respond emotionally and outwardly. Using a silence-based orientation to stimuli, immediate reactions are rendered unnecessary, perhaps unwanted. Instead, stimuli are met with silence allowing time for a considered and informed response.

5. Wisdom - Silence is an artifact of wisdom. Wisdom integrates learnings from experience, information, and preferences acquired overtime. It is framed in reflection and evidenced in purposeful thought and action. Silence provides a *buffer-in-time* to consider an aligned response to a situation.


Vow of Silence

Contemplating Dr. Lickerman's *gifts* received from using silence, gives rise to the question of our ability to be silent. Sensibly, in order to use silence as a method for building meaningful personal and productive business relationships, we first must be familiar with and comfortable within silence. Vows of silence are ancient traditions that offer us opportunities to explore silence. A key aspect of being silent is ceasing communications with others in order to withdraw from the actions and distractions of the world. As a result, social conventions, especially conversation is suspended allowing a more reflective and sensitized perception of the world.

Consider this simple exercise to explore silence. Decide to be silent for a period of time in a specific area; for example one hour at home. Inform those around you that will be remaining silent for this time period, which includes speech, gestures, and other communications that might disrupt your focus on silence. Before beginning the exercise, decide if there is a goal you want to achieve while being silent such as quietude, observation, or reflection. Once the exercise is completed, reflect on it, determine if you've achieved your goal or if other goals have emerged for future periods of silence, and re-engage your normal activities.

Silence and Self Development

Silence can promote reflective thought and purposeful action. Coaches may help you explore silence or recommend other professionals who can enhance your understanding and use of silence as strength.

As we say; get coached; get results! 

Michael Williams, Ph.D.

Associate Dean, MBA Program
School of Business and Technology
Thomas Edison State College
Tel: 1-609-984-1130, ext. 3202
Email: mwilliams@tesc.edu

Esther Muller

Co-Founder of the Academy for
Coaching and Training & Master Coach
Tel: 646-391-7406
Esther@EmpowerAct.com
www.EsterMuller.com
www.RealEstateAcademy.com