

Welcome to Quiet Courage – October 2008

The online newsletter for navigating life's changes and transitions from Bailey Coaching and Mary Ann Bailey, MC.

Feature Article: Where Is Your Attention?

Zen teacher, Cheri Huber, has a great saying which goes, "The quality of your life is determined by the focus of your attention". It is a simple, yet powerful, statement, which if taken to heart, can dramatically change one's life.

The key phrase in this statement is "the focus of your attention". Most of us are not really aware of where we put our attention. We can go through an experience and come out feeling irritated or annoyed, but we don't usually think that these feelings are the result of anything we did, but rather they are the result of being involved in an event over which we had no control.

Let's see what happens when 2 people go through the same experience, but choose to focus their attention differently. Scott and John are standing in a long grocery line which is moving at a snail's pace. Scott is focusing his attention on the trouble the checker is having with the scanner.

With each item that fails to scan, Scott gets more and more irritated. He starts making snide comments about the skills of the checker and when that fails to speed up the process, he demands to see the manager. His conversation with the manager does little to dissipate his anger, and Scott ends up leaving the store in a fit of rage and without his groceries.

John, on the other hand, realizes that there seems to be a problem with the scanner. He looks around and sees that the other lines are just as long, so he decides to spend his time reading the latest issue of People Magazine which is sitting at the check-out counter. Before he knows it, it is his turn to check out and he leaves the store in a fairly good mood.

John could have chosen to focus on what was wrong with the scanner and Scott could have chosen to read People Magazine. Neither one had control over the issue of the broken scanner, but they both had control over what they wanted to pay attention to.

Learning to focus our attention can eliminate a great deal of stress in our lives. Every day we are confronted with a myriad of work issues, family problems, and national events which can drain every drop of positive energy and hope that we have. The nightly news alone is enough to send the strongest person into a minor depression.

Therefore, it's very important to have a technique available that will empower us to draw our focus away from all that negative information and energy and shift it to something more uplifting and invigorating.

It's important to note, however, that the practice of focusing our attention is not about being Pollyannish; nor is it about ignoring issues or only seeing the good in everything. That would cause its own set of problems. Focusing our attention is about being very intentional in regards to how much time and energy we want to spend mucking around in the dirt. Certainly there are times when we have to get dirty; but we don't need to live there on a permanent basis.

If there is a problem at work or home which needs to be dealt with, deal with it as proactively as possible and then move your attention to what is next. It is not useful or even healthy to