**When Hearing Voices is a Good Thing**

Which voices matter?

Recently, I worked with an extremely accomplished middle school Principal responsible for leading her campus through the most difficult time of school closure, distance learning, bringing students back to campus all while helping both her staff and the families feel safe. This in addition to abiding by the ever-changing guidelines coming from her district leaders.

During one of our meetings, she shared that her biggest challenge was not knowing what voices to listen to. Everyone had a thought or opinion about what she should be doing, how she should be feeling, leading, expressing, praying and so on. She said she was so confused by the voices that it was causing her high-level anxiety. The leader, while she is accomplished and certainly capable to lead her faculty, students, and families, was not aware of how the voices held sway and influence over her internal landscape.

Over the course of the conversation, she observed two distinct qualities about these voices.

1. She was hearing voices that did not help her gain wisdom about or further the initiative at hand.
2. She had no intentional plan for how to use the voices of others in a way that would bring her a benefit and not a liability.

Have you had the experience of people speaking into your life who are not necessarily adding to the strength of your work or life, but rather their words are confusing and sometimes produce a paralyzing anxiety?

That can happen when there is no plan to intentionally tap into the voices that are the most beneficial to you, meanwhile having grace (but light regard) for the voices that do not understand or can’t make a meaningful contribution to your life.

**I listen to voices**

I have several voices I listen to:

* The first is the voice of God.  As part of that relationship, I have a monthly call with a prayer partner. That call is vitally important  to instill courage in moving forward and providing stamina to do so. She prays almost nothing but the Scriptures.  I often feel like I'm not just drinking from the font of living waters, but standing underneath a cascading waterfall, washing off all the fleshly insecurities, fantasies and ego-centric thoughts of the month.  Such a cleansing time it is for me!
* I also have a business consultant who speaks logically into my business processes and functions, bringing a sense of order and sustainability to the operations. It is a relationship that slows me down in order to move the business forward faster.  His voice is invaluable to me to help me to STOP and THINK about what I'm saying I want to do, ensuring that all the pieces fit together well.
* Once a month I meet with a very seasoned and successful business man who challenges me with tough questions, compelling me to look at things from a new or less obvious perspective. After I have laid out my ideas and plans, he cuts them to the core with two little but powerful words: What IF? These conversations are invigorating, disruptive and invited! They have changed the course of events for me personally and professionally more than once but always with confirmation first from the other voices I'm describing in this list, and then measured steps in accordance with final decisions.
* Finally, there are the conversations I have with a long time trusted friend. These conversations, with my constant encourager, ground me with honesty, history and hope.

I listen to voices: Not just any voices, but the voices that help me thrive. I am intentional about the voices that I listen to and very aware of the impact they have in my life.

**What voices are you listening to? Have you given it much thought?**

On any given day, you may not be aware of the people (voices) speaking into your life. They say things like, "If I were you, I wouldn’t do that" or "I thought you would have quit that by now" or "Are you still trying to make your business work?" The voices we hear are not always invited, but they are certainly present.

**Stay on the Right Side of What You Hear**

You can use the power of the voices that speak into your life to serve as a part of your foundation and strength of operation, only if you stay on the right side of what you hear. The right side is the side where you actively participate in approving who gets to speak into your life on a deep level. The people that I mentioned above are influencers in my life by invitation. Not only do I count on them, I welcome them. Each one brings a different element of wisdom or truth to be explored.

I feel confident that I am better off having this council of voices. By listening to them (yes, even when we do not agree), I grow and keep a strong foundation - one that has a perspective open to being challenged and even expanded. I do not want to be siloed in my own ideas and thoughts. That is a dangerous place to be!  It is imperative that I am open to wisdom so that my company and non-profit benefit from that openness.

As the Principal I mentioned learned above, having a predetermined set of voices that I listen to, keeps me free from reacting to the random voices that offer unsolicited advice or direction. I move so much lighter!  Running my businesses and non profit in ways that are much less encumbered.

**Selecting Your Voices**

Not only is it important to have people of your choice speaking into your life, but it is also beneficial to have those people bring their unique perspective. Do they challenge you, encourage you or stretch you? Here are characteristics to consider when you are bringing influencing voices into your life:

**The Voice of Reason**

This voice helps you look at things logically or will help you think through the possibilities of your direction or idea. They will not exactly tell you not to do something, but rather they will help you stand firm in your convictions and values in the things you do.

**Disruptor**

This voice is the "what if" voice that I mentioned above. This person may challenge you or throw your status quo way off balance. The result? The disruptor may keep you from being stagnant and allowing irrelevance to creep into your business or life.

**Encourager**

This person reminds you of the goodness of your vision and seeks to inspire you forward. They believe in you and in your dream or mission.

There will be times when you need the Disruptor. Other times you will need the Voice of Reason. And then there will be days when you need the energetic refreshment that your encourager brings. Having these three voices can bring balance to your life and add a ballast or a source of stability so that when the uninvited voices speak and chime in, you are less likely to be shaken or moved by what they say. You have your council of voices who understand what you are pouring your life out for and are committed to your best outcome.

The Principal I worked with learned to tune out the random voices by intentionally inviting the voices that she wishes to listen to and who are there to support her success and the way forward.

Who is a part of your council of voices? How can they help you go further than you could on your own?

Hearing voices can be a good thing! Give it a try.

I would be happy to explore your preferred future with you – simply reach out and we can set up a complimentary call.



**About Cheryl Scanlan**

Cheryl Scanlan, MCC, CMCC, BCC is president of C3Advantage. She has worked with CEOs that are in Fortune 100 through next generation small business owners. Having also run a multi-million dollar firm in New York, Cheryl knows the importance of business goals and the impact of teams. Cheryl's thought partnering method helps leaders see clearly what is fuzzy, articulate what is currently unintelligible, and generate coherent and executable strategy.

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