

LISTENING TO THE INNER VOICE

Twenty years ago, I attended a 3-day workshop on the topic of empowerment. This workshop was given by Gail Straub and David Gershon, two leaders in the field, and it was an intense, rich experience.

Over the course of the weekend we did exercises alone or with a partner, and then gathered into small groups to discuss our experiences. One of the participants was a freelance writer from Brooklyn named Marcia.

It happened that several times Marcia and I ended up in the same small group. The first time, she explained to the group that she had recently been in Florida where she had a transforming experience swimming with dolphins. She assumed that was why her image in the exercise we had just completed was all about dolphins. We discussed it.

The second time I was in her small group, Marcia said, "It seems crazy, but the image that came to me this time also involved dolphins." And we discussed it.

Later we found ourselves together in a small group once more, and again she talked about dolphins. And again we discussed it.

On the last day, in our last meeting, I found myself yet again in a small group with Marcia. Our task had been to do a visualization exercise about how we would apply the approach we'd been learning to our future work. When it was her turn to speak, Marcia said, "I'm sure it's a metaphor for something, but my visualization was all about dolphins."

That could have been. Perhaps it was a metaphor. Yet I was moved to say, "Is it possible that your interest in dolphins isn't just a metaphor? Is it possible you want your work to include them in some way?" Tears flooded her cheeks, and she said she couldn't even bear to consider that possibility. Her desire was so strong, she couldn't allow herself to hope.

Others in the group chimed in, and eventually Marcia agreed to take two steps to explore her love of dolphins. One was very simple: find a poster of dolphins and put it over her computer, where she could see it as she worked. The other was to find out whether any aquariums in the New York area had dolphins, so she could volunteer and be around them.

About two years later, I was surprised to receive a letter from Marcia. 'Since I had been there when she agreed to explore dolphins,' she wrote, 'I might like to know what happened.'

She had bought a poster and put it over her computer. She had volunteered at the aquarium, spending many hours cutting up fish and swabbing floors. Eventually, she fell in love with the dolphin trainer. She was writing to tell me that she was about to be married, and that she and her soon-to-be husband were moving to Hawaii, to train dolphins together.

Shivers ran down my spine when I read that letter. Marcia's story is inspiring to people because it shows what magic can happen when they allow themselves to "follow their bliss" as Joseph Campbell suggested. A woman from Brooklyn, finding a life partner, and doing work she

loves in a beautiful part of the world—it's like a fairy tale. However, it didn't require a fairy godmother, and it didn't mean taking huge, dangerous leaps of faith.

Marcia continued her work as a freelance writer while she volunteered. She stayed put while she explored this interest—she didn't abruptly pull up stakes and move to Florida to be "around dolphins." In short, she responsibly pursued her dreams and those dreams came true.

What if there was no 'Prince Charming?' What if she never had the opportunity to move to Hawaii? She still would have been including dolphins in her life—and that willingness to be true to herself would have informed and enriched her life in other ways.

I've often used this story in workshops or in private sessions as a way of illustrating the concept of the power of listening to the inner voice and acting on it. Even the most diehard of my workshop attendees seem inspired by this story, and it offers them an example of how big and seemingly unattainable one's dreams can be, yet still be within reach. Having heard this story, one's own dreams don't seem quite as far-fetched.

I was in touch with Marcia recently to interview her for this book. She still lives in Hawaii and she and her husband now have a son. About this experience, she said,

My internal message about dolphins was so clear, I just needed someone to reflect it back to me in that workshop so I could hear it.

I am grateful that happened. As the years have gone on, I realize my internal voice has gotten really loud. And I can't ignore it because if I don't listen, there are real consequences for me. I'm sure that's true for everybody but if I don't listen to my inner voice, I find myself experiencing depression, misery, and resentment. What I've learned is that if you're not happy, you're not listening.

I love the simplicity and power of Marcia's statement—"if you're not happy, you're not listening." Or, I might add, perhaps you're listening but not willing to hear.

Marcia's journey started in a workshop setting where we were all being encouraged to listen to that inner voice. Our leaders used techniques like meditation and guided visualization to assist us. I'm sure that made it easier. But you and I experience these messages every day if we are open to listening to them and acting on them.

It takes courage and a willingness to trust. It takes discernment to tease out what is wishful thinking and what is a true inner prompting. That requires time, patience and practice. These promptings are guides that help direct our steps toward an authentic expression of ourselves in our lives.

I have shared Marcia's story because it demonstrates so vividly the power of being true to yourself. If you feel that in some way you haven't been true to yourself, I hope Marcia's story will serve as an inspiration.

There are many reasons why people have trouble recognizing their inner voice, let alone being able to act on it. In this book, we will explore the barriers each of us faces in living a full color life. We'll also explore in depth the pre-requisites to full color living, and we will discover valuable clues that will help you build a more fully-expressive life.

Along the way, you will find ideas, tools and approaches designed to help you regain contact with your wise inner voice, and to help you take action toward your own full color life.



FULL COLOR REFLECTION:

THE INNER VOICE

Listening to the inner voice is a discipline that can be practiced. The first step is to find a place of peacefulness and ask that centered part of you for a response. Methods that quiet the mind, such as meditation or simply sitting in silence and focusing on an object or thought, can help the wise part within step forward.

Some people hear a response, others see one visually, still others get a gut feeling of what's right. Sometimes, when I am looking for guidance on a specific topic, I will sit in front of the computer, quietly center myself and try to disengage from any wishes or expectations I might have. Then I type in a question, place my hands on the keyboard, close my eyes and type. What I find on the screen when I open my eyes is often a wise, calming response that takes a longer view than the current turmoil I may be experiencing.

Full color living is supported when we listen to the wise inner voice and act on its promptings. That requires being able to discriminate between all the competitive voices in our heads, and attend to the quiet, calm source of wisdom at the center of our being.



*Note to those who have downloaded this chapter:
Here is Marcia in Hawaii in a recent photo!*

[If you enjoyed this chapter, order the book!](#)

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