The Power of Permission

**By Andrea Maehr, RN**

Remember, in school, when you needed a permission slip from the teacher to leave the classroom for any reason? Without that slip, you dared not tread beyond the classroom door. I clearly remember those days thanks to one incident stored in my memory banks forever.

It was a day like any other parochial school day. I was in the second grade. On this particular day, about mid-afternoon, I began to feel the need to use the restroom. Looking at the clock, I determined I would be able to hold it until school was out.

That was a massive miscalculation.

As my bladder continued to fill, the clock seemed to slow. With each passing minute, I became more and more uncomfortable.

Finally, in desperation, my hand shot up and I requested permission to go to the restroom. To my absolute horror, my teacher said, “No.” I could not believe my ears. In a soft, and slightly desperate voice, I said, “But I really have to go.” She responded with a more emphatic “NO” followed by, “There isn’t much time left, you can hold it.”

What she didn’t understand was I had already been “HOLDING IT.” Not wanting to disturb the class further, I accepted her decision without fuss. Finally, prayer time arrived. As I stood, panic set in. It was easier to “hold it” when I was sitting. When I stood up, the floodgates (literally) opened. Rather than run for the bathroom, I stood with tears running down my face and urine running down my legs into my shoes and onto the floor. I was mortified. The bell rang and I shot out of the room as fast as my little seven-year-old legs would take me, bolting into the bathroom to mop up my wet panties, socks and shoes.

To this day, I can still resurrect the feeling of disappointment I felt because I lacked the courage to just leave the room, save my dignity and take the consequences. I suffered because I waited for permission from someone else to do something I knew I needed to do for my own good.

It is understandable we have these experiences as children, but even as adults we tend to seek out other people’s permission. This conditioning keeps us paralyzed by the fear of doing something I’m “not supposed to do” or that would be viewed as “inappropriate.” So, we wait for someone to tell us it is okay.

Other times, it isn’t really someone else’s permission we are waiting for, it is our own. As a caregiver, I spend a great deal of time taking care of others. Family and friends have repeatedly told me to make sure I am taking care of myself, too. Even though I have their permission, I refuse to give permission to myself. It feels selfish putting my needs ahead of others. Only recently have I finally given myself permission to take time for myself, to rest, to play, to breathe, without feeling guilty!

Bronnie Ware, in her book *Top Five Regrets of the Dying* lists the number one regret as “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.” In other words, “I wish I had not waited for that permission slip. I wish I had given myself permission to live life on my terms.”

Denying yourself what is rightfully yours -- whether it is the person you really want to be, the work you really want to do, the place you really want to live, or the partner you really want to spend your life with -- affects your health and your happiness. Many people would suffer less, be a lot happier, a lot healthier and live a lot longer if they simply gave themselves permission to live a life that makes them happy and were not worried about what others thought of them. Being happy is directly related to being healthy, and we have to give ourselves permission to be both.

If you wait for others to give you permission, you give away your power. You may find yourself waiting a long time, maybe even a lifetime. Paralyzed, you will never step into the joy and freedom of following your dreams. Instead you resign yourself to live someone else’s life, someone else’s dream or as Henry David Thoreau said “…a life of quiet desperation.”

Taking back the power of permission can be as simple as writing yourself a permission slip. It can go something like this; “I give (your name) permission to (be, do, have whatever it is you need permission for) beginning today!” Seeing it in writing gives it more validity. Post it in a place you will see it first thing in the morning and in other places where you will see it throughout the day. Then don’t just read it, do it!

In the end, you don’t really need anyone else’s permission. It is never too late to be the superhero in your own life and utilize your superpower: the power of permission. With a new year fast approaching, it is the perfect time to give this some thought and begin 2018 with permission to be, do or have whatever it is your heart desires. It may be the most liberating thing you ever do for yourself.

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