

# Speaking up: What are you waiting for?

In these columns, I've discussed how to overcome conflict with patients, how to become an engaging speaker and how to give effective feedback to peers. Of course, generating the confidence you need to speak up whenever a workplace situation calls for it can present challenges.

When it first occurred to me that I ought to work on increasing my confidence as a public speaker, I decided I'd join a local Toastmasters club. I knew this was a huge step, and it proved easier to talk about than to do. The thought of having to speak in front of others, even in such a safe learning environment, was absolutely terrifying. I made three attempts in the following five years to join the club. Once I became a member and began giving speeches regularly, I didn't look back.

Even when I know that certain nurses have undergone similar training to improve their communication skills, I have found that when the opportunity or need arises for speaking up, they may fail to take action. One major obstacle is inertia, which can have an impact on all aspects of someone's personal and professional life and prevent them from getting their voice heard. How do we allow inertia to set in when we know we want to speak up?

- **Deciding that the timing isn't quite right.** We convince ourselves that "later" is a better time because we will be more prepared and will have organized our thoughts.
- **Waiting for a better mood.** We may be stressed, annoyed or discouraged about a situation and believe that it's necessary for us to be in the right frame of mind first.

- **Accepting that priorities will change.** When we put off speaking up, it's with full knowledge that the situation is eventually going to diminish in importance to us and that the need to address it will fade. In other words, the patient will be discharged, the colleague will seek a transfer, the manager will retire.

Inertia prevents us from taking steps that help us grow and make a positive impact. The key, then, is to focus on the difference speaking up can make for you, your patients and your peers. Here are some tips on overcoming inertia:

- **Take imperfect action.** Don't wait for the circumstances to be ideal. Taking action of any kind, even when you don't feel ready to speak up, will get you moving in the right direction.
- **Focus on positive results.** What if I fail? What if the other person gets defensive? What if I become tongue-tied? Instead of thinking about the potential for negative outcomes, allow yourself to reflect on the possibilities that come to mind with a different question: Might things change for the better because of my actions?
- **Get support.** Sharing your thoughts with trusted colleagues about how you want to address a particular issue can generate excitement, confidence and ideas. Seek out and surround yourself with coaches and role models in your organization who support the voices of nurses.

I wish you every success in communicating with clarity, confidence and compassion. ■

If you'd like Barb's help with a communication problem in your workplace, tweet her!



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