DOUG SILSBEE, PCC

Week Six: Orient to the Environment

I am an introvert. I know I'm in an extroverted line of work, and I really enjoy presenting to workshops and large audiences. Still, I really have to work with myself to show up and be authentic in front of an audience. My preference is to hang out at the refreshments table and eat cookies!

My anxiety is always most intense in the half hour before going on stage. Once I'm in it, it's fun and easy. But, I can suffer during that last thirty minutes!

A helpful way to get myself present, relaxed, and ready is to orient myself to the surroundings. I survey the audience in advance, looking for friendly faces and people I know. I look around the room, noticing the lighting, the details of the décor, where I'm positioned in the room. When I go up on stage, I don't jump right in. I take a few seconds to survey the audience from the podium, and to see what the room looks like from there. When I begin, I begin in a deliberate way.

This orienting is fundamental a biological process. When we constrict our attention to focus primarily on something that we're anxious about, that anxiety tends to expand and fill our awareness even more. When we orient to the larger surroundings, our attention relaxes and softens, and the biological organism that is us feels safer, more resourceful, and more ready for whatever comes next.

Practice orienting. Next time you enter a meeting, for example, deliberately scan the room, taking in every person in there, and the surroundings as well. Let yourself relax into the surroundings, feeling that you belong there. See how it changes the feeling of being there.

Or, if you're coming into a one-on-one conversation that might be challenging, orient yourself before and during the conversation. Let your attention broaden and soften to include other things than the person and agenda that are foremost. It's not that you're avoiding the person; you're simply placing the person and the conversation in a broader context, and perhaps lowering the stakes a little so that you can be more relaxed and more resourceful.

Doug Silsbee is a leadership coach, author and master teacher in Asheville, NC. His most recent book is ***Presence-Based Coaching***. More information on Doug's work is at http://dougsilsbee.com.
Inquire at ds@dougsilsbee.com or 828-254-2021 for a free consultation.

Copyright © 2008, Doug Silsbee. Permission is hereby granted to reproduce and share this piece in its entirety, provided that no changes are made, the intact resource box at the end is included, and a copy of the use is provided to the author. For permission for edits, excerpts, or other changes, contact Doug Silsbee at 828-254-2021 or ds@dougsilsbee.com.