

Your Yes No Canary

Judy Rosemarin

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Being true to yourself is a wonderful thing to aim for, but not always easy. Our busy lives pull us in myriad directions and as a result, at the multi directional fast pace, we don't always listen to our inner selves to appreciate the deep wisdom contained therein. For example how do you respond to questions, with authenticity when you either need to say "yes" or "no?"

Think about the last time you said "yes" and really meant it. Were you really pleased with what you said? Did you feel good about it? What was it that you said "yes" to that really worked out? As you recall those times, are you smiling or are you having another response? Or, did you regret saying "yes?"

If you are not smiling thinking about the last time you said "yes" when you really wanted to say "no." Were you afraid to do so? What were the resulting consequences of saying "yes" when you didn't mean it and what turned out when you said, "no" when you really deep inside wanted to say, "yes?" Did that make you smile?

How come you did that? What made you say something that wasn't really honest and true to your feelings?

Then think about the times you said "no" when you really were dying to say "yes!" How did that turn out? Did it make you smile and happy?

Hmmm. Well, you are not alone. People do it all the time. Even I do it but less frequently now. I think I do it because I have some kind of uncertainty, reluctance or even a fear to not express my truth in the moment. (Just to be clear, we often have to say "yes" to business demands from our bosses, clients or cohorts and we do have to say "yes" even though we might not like to do it, but I am talking about even then, how to be more authentic with yourself and others.)

What would happen if you made a promise to yourself to say "yes" or "no" and mean it with each contextual situation? Scary? Intriguing? Impossible?

What would stop you? Movies in your mind of how it will impact others? Rejection? If you say "no" will that mean you will never be asked again? If you say "yes" and not mean it, how enjoyable will it be for you?

In interviewing, the anxiety of getting a job offer so often overrides logic, the heart pounding for relief from the lack of a job so some people tend to accept positions that are way off the track. As a result, people wind up doing poorly. You work twice as hard to overcompensate for the discomfort when you said "yes" when you really felt "no" this job is really not for me now.

I remember a wonderful client who used to do this all the time. Harry was a good guy. But, he would wind up saying the opposite of what he felt because he was such a people pleaser, but he paid for it, dearly. Then he realized, through our conversations, that he had this "little canary" inside of him (in a "jungle of noises") that he didn't listen to often enough. The "little canary" was drowned out by his people pleasing, rushing against deadlines, thus distracting him from his inner knowing. But when he

did slow down, sit still and really listen, when he stayed still long enough to check in and hear, he heard his own wisdom speaking. Do you think he was surprised? You bet he was...and delighted. After that, he began tuning into that little bird voice with childlike curiosity. Then he learned how to speak his truth and as a result, his decisions were stronger and gratifying. Actually, people liked being around him more because he seemed more at peace and real. And for Harry, when he listened, he never looked back or second guessed himself. His was his own "yes/no" canary.

A famous family therapist, Virginia Satir with whom I once studied, told me that she thought that many people's problems (she was not talking about interviewing per se) stem from the fact that when they mean "yes" they say "no" and vice versa. This causes for a lot of pain, unhappiness and it can build internal resentment that compounds over years, much like a bank account but it isn't going to buy you anything.

You have a right to be happy and also the opportunity to be authentic and truthful to yourself and others. Much like Polonius said to Laertes in Hamlet, "To thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

So, try listening to your canary as you become more comfortable by saying "yes" and or "no" when you hear it from deep inside. You might discover more joy and less stress while becoming more true to yourself. After all, you ARE your canary!