

LACKING A VOICE

Several years ago after giving a six hour seminar in Texas an attendee approached me as I was packing my equipment to start the drive to the next city on my speaking tour. The gentleman identified himself as a local television news personality, with his own current events program. Additionally, he said he was a practicing mental health professional. He complimented me on my seminar and went on that he would like to interview me on his program. With that he said, "Send me a copy of your book and we will work out a time you can come out for the show." I told him I had no book, he looked a bit confused as if he had not heard me correctly and reiterated, "Just send me your book". Again I told him there was no book. This time my statement sunk in, he looked surprised and a bit frustrated and said, well then I don't want you on my show". With that he walked off. This has happened several times since then.

I have come to realize if a professional wants to have their ideas taken seriously they must write them down in a book well enough to get it published and for it to sell. It doesn't count if you speak at international conferences articulately, capture the audiences' attention, give great handout and are well regarded as a knowledgeable professional in your field, if you do not have a book to your name few if any people listen. It is funny, I am considered an excellent public speaker, and expert in my field, but I have no voice because I have no book.

For the longest time this has been unfathomable to me. Book and reading have never been considered a major life activity to me. If I could get the information contained in a book by alternative means (interviewing someone who read the book, watching a movie about the book, getting the Cliff/Monarch Notes, looking up summaries on the internet, etc.) has always been fine to me. In fact I liked it better. I did not have to slowly plow through hundreds of pages attempting to comprehend, and remember piles of seemingly unrelated data so I could eventually assemble it into a cogent idea. Often I find myself reading a professional book for underlines the first time. When the first reading is completed I really have no comprehension about what I have "read". The second reading is far slower, but infinitely more understandable. I write down all the underlines essentially. The multisensory process of writing down what I read, often verbatim helps me to comprehend the passage. This often gives me a deep understanding of the material, but the price in time and effort to do this has profoundly negated my ability to make a living as a psychologist. I can say this method makes it so I remember what I have read.

The advent of devices like the Intel Reader, and Kindle with the speech to text function enabled has been a Godsend for me. I can use my strong auditory comprehension and memory to learn what a book contains much faster than my old method, but I find it still is substantially slower than all my colleagues. Most of my colleagues have a hard time believing I never curl up on the couch in front of the fireplace and read a good novel. To me that is as

much fun as preparing the materials to send my accountant to do the family annual tax return. There is one difference though if I do not prepare the taxes I can get in trouble with the law, but if I do not read a novel nothing bad happens.

Do not get me wrong since the day books on tape became available I have read them. Today my wife and I will sit on the back porch, put the Kindle on speech to text and “read”, books by Tom Clancy, Oliver Sacks, and others. I find it quite enjoyable, because I do not have to struggle to decode the text, comprehend it and remember it.

My wife, who is a retired psychologist and well educated is a voracious reader. She often rereads the classics and the book of the New York Times best seller lists, etc. She talks about the qualities of an author’s “voice”. Before I knew her I never knew authors had such things. After some time she was able to impart to me what this is and why literary people find it essential. For most reading is not to just learn skills, but it is a conversation with the author. For me it is just a way to learn skills and valuable facts. Books are instruction manuals. Only recently have I read a humorous passage and actually comprehended it well enough to laugh. This I attribute to many years of practice reading. Like they say, “practice makes perfect.” I just need a hell of a lot more practice and I will never approach anything that looks remotely perfect.

As a funny aside my wife was taught using whole language reading curriculums in the 1950s and 60s in Arkansas public schools. She has about a 30,000 English sight word reading vocabulary, but no word attack skills. When she encounters a word she has never seen before she must ask her profoundly dyslexic husband who has been taught some Orton-Gillingham to sound it out for her.

I save my “reading energy” for print reading professional journal articles that are not in alternative formats and do not lend themselves well to the processing of the Intel Reader. The same applies to professional level books. It is always a slow slog.

Supposedly being a literate educated guy I occasionally find myself in a social conversation with a voracious reader who want to discuss their favorite authors with me and seem miffed at the poverty of “serious authors” I have read. On occasion people will give me some huge novel as a gift and seem insulted when I have not read it by the next time I see them. This even happens with people who know I am dyslexic. When I have asked some of them why do you give me books as gifts when you know I am dyslexic they say they know I am dyslexic but they know it is not serious because I would not have been able to get a Ph.D. if it was serious. I wonder what makes them such an expert?

One very good friend I have told since my diagnosis I am dyslexic and he seemed to acknowledge this information as well as process it. A few years ago while visiting our home

he asked to see my website. I pull out my laptop and he read the first paragraph of the home page and said, "You lied to me!" I asked him how I did so and he said when we were in college together you did not tell me you were hearing impaired and dyslexic. I told him I did not know I had my disabilities until I was 26, long after we graduated undergrad. He still said I lied to him. His wife intervened and finally he understood. He then said if he would have known he could have helped me. By then, feeling a bit hurt and discounted, I said, "how would you have helped me?" He could not answer. Things recovered in minutes and we are still the best of friends.

A good friend's mother who was a widow and dating a very nice gentleman, whom she seem quite taken with and considering marrying went to a Christmas day party I attended without him. I innocently asked where he was and she said she had learned a few days prior he could not read. She continued she did not want to hang around with an idiot. I told her there were ways that her ex-boyfriend could be taught to learn to read. She said she did not care he was still an idiot. She knew I am a "doctor", but she did not know what kind, nor what I specialized in. I told her I am dyslexic and that I am a psychologist who is an expert in dyslexia. She made a derogatory comment about the mental health of psychologists, intimated I was lacking in intelligence, and went on her way. She had a high school degree.

Writing has always been a nightmare for me. All the simultaneous processing required, the spelling, punctuation, and grammar, recalling in the correct sequence of the motor engrams to write with a pen/pencil, and the taxation on the working memory. From an early age it took me exponentially more time to produce prose, a book report, a letter, e-mail, etc. than my peers. When I opened my independent practice I quickly realized reports which took my colleagues 4 hours to write took me on a good day 20 hours to write. There were times I had to put so much time into writing a report it worked out I was making less than minimum wage.

No matter how hard I tried and how much I practiced I could not learn how to touch type. I attempted to use a dictation machine, etc. with the same poor results. So I was relegated to handwriting all my reports, some of which were 50 pages single spaced. After I completed writing the report long hand, I gave it to a typist who would produce a draft typed report. My next task was to proof it. You can guess how that went. I soon got the reputation of having excellent reports in terms of content, but they butchered the English language. I once got a call from a disability specialist from a university who was working with a young woman I had recently diagnosed as being dyslexic. The former client was asking for accommodations for her disability from the university. The disability specialist asked me if the woman was psychotic. This was a question beyond right field to me. I said no what on Earth made he think that. She read a sentence from the report to me, "Ms. X has affectations of going to college." The sentence was to read, "Ms. X had aspirations of going to college." Although humorous inn this situation, this happened constantly.

Occasionally, I would ask the typist de jure why they had not caught such an error and invariably they would say, "I figured that's the way you wanted it." I would follow with the question, "why would you think I wanted that?" Their response would be something like, "you are a doctor and I just figured that is how it should be." All these people were aware I am dyslexic and part of their job was to correct my spelling, punctuation and grammar, but none of them quite understood this.

When I was doing reports constantly my life revolved around writing constantly. I would work through weekends and holidays as well into the wee hours of the night. My life revolved around work. The only thing outside of work I did is ride bikes and go to the gym (a bike related activity). I had no life.

It also hurt I just barely made it by through my work financially. I asked some famous disability attorneys if I could charge by the hour for the work. I would essentially charge 5 times more for the same work my colleges did in 5 times less time than I did. They said that would not be ethical and recommended I charge by the job based on the lower end of the range of fees my fellow psychologists charged. That did not help emotionally. I knew I knew more than my fellow psychologists about SLD, and AD/HD in my region, because I was always getting more training, etc. in the area. But, I could not charge more. This also made it almost impossible to receive third party payment from medical insurance companies for my services. I was on one insurance panel for a few years, but got off it because they would pay me pennies on the dollar and the amount of paper work involved grew exponentially and the one thing I did not need was more paper work. So I went to a totally cash practice.

Eventually, I burned out. In 2000 I saw an advertisement in a psychology trade paper for psychologists who could give continuing education seminars to mental health professionals and I jumped at the offer. In high school I had developed good public speaking skills and by then I was considered a walking talking encyclopedia of SLD, AD/HD, and Asperger's disorder. So on January 1, 2001 I closed my practice and focused on doing seminars, webinars, and consulting. I now have a life and family, and my work is more rewarding; although not financially. That is a common problem of adults with SLD, AD/HD, and autism spectrum disorder. I have all the arguments for saying making money is not everything memorized, but I still have problems when I see a friend who has done much better than me from their work, especially if they have less education than me.

Several times I have attempted to write a book, because to be anyone one must write a book. I get about 50 pages of rambling done and run out of gas. Thinking about adding all the references and all the rewrites (knowing I will need many more than "literate" writers), plus the fatigue of writing takes the steam out.

I am currently running out of steam so I am going to stop writing now.