

Strength while “On the Carpet”

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In the wee hours of the night the phone rang. It was, let’s call her Beth, calling from South Korea. She couldn’t get to sleep because her boss had called her *on the carpet*. She was expected to be reprimanded and, perhaps, fired. She was told her English as a Second Language teaching met expectations but her attitude was a problem. She was accused of not being a team player and of abruptly hanging up the phone on her manager. Actually, her cell phone had gone dead but he was unwilling to hear her explanation. She was told to meet with her manager and his supervisor at eight thirty in the morning.

Beth could have easily become defensive, making counter attacks and complaints about her unreasonable boss. However, since she wanted to continue working for this organization, she needed another strategy to maintain respect for herself and others. Beth and I made a plan to keep her steady when meeting with these two decision-makers. Beth gave me permission to share, in part, her learning from this challenging situation:

“Yes, it is about acceptance, that people will live and act according to their experience, issues and place in the grand scheme of things. Darn! You mean I have to develop resiliency and an attitude of self acceptance for my imperfections plus know that human beings will let me down and disappoint me? But it does I guess all come back to me, my actions and reactions.

Here is the info you gave me. After phoning you at three a.m., I copied them out on a sheet, studied a bit and finally drifted off to four hours of rest before the meeting.

1. **Take a symbol of love:**

You told me ‘In one hand hold a stone or small object that has personal meaning-- gives love vibration.’ I had just been given a small dog charm by one of my seven year old students. I held onto the tiny dog charm through the whole interview and then returned it safely to my pocket.

2. **Develop an assertive line or two to say over and over:**

I used ‘I think we’ve had a misunderstanding’ and ‘I have done my best.’ I used these after each time they accused me of wrong doings. Not once did I counter attack or state anything negative.

3. **Look at the most kind and supportive face. Breathe in that energy:**

I tried to do that. My manager’s supervisor was pretty supportive of me during all the allegations. Then there was a brief flicker of the eye when he returned alone for the

final talk. In that millisecond I knew I had succeeded. I knew that he knew I was unfairly treated and the tide had turned.

4. **‘What do you suggest that I do?’** Ask this question of the most supportive person, hopefully the one facilitating the meeting:

I also asked, ‘What can I do differently?’ They liked these questions and seemed to calmed as their positions and status were acknowledged. Plus when they had to explain how I could greatly improve my performance they were forced to justify their allegations.”

Beth bounced back from unfounded accusations and was strong throughout a difficult meeting. She used some basic resilient strategies such as:

- Initially reached out for support
- Arranged adequate rest
- Attended to stress in her body through breathing
- Managed her self talk
- Spoke respectfully and expected to be treated likewise
- Invited connection and support
- Sought to come to a mutual agreement
- Was open to learning from the experience
- In the end, saw humour in the situation

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