

# Using Your *Magic* in the Middle of Chaos!

Jennifer Webb

Laurel was a self-taught artist who left home at 14 with a serious bone disease and a few clothes in a paper bag. The jewelry she created was so spectacular that while still a teenager people would stop her in the street to ask about her work. She had a philosophy: “I refuse to have anything in my life I can’t turn into something magical and beautiful.”

I mention her because as we work on making sense of, in all probability, the most challenging year we’ve ever faced, we have an enormous responsibility to be a beacon for wisdom, strength, hope, compassion and possibilities for others, even in the midst of all this chaos. People need our magic. And even as we brace for the election, using all our creativity to keep our jobs or our companies while avoiding the landmines of the pandemic, our frustrations and fears can give us new insights.

Where you are makes no difference. Whether you’re feeling lucky to have a job right now or you’ve grown your company exponentially over the years, you’re in health care or food service, none of that is relevant. Whoever you are and whatever you do, compassion and empathy are in high demand these days.

“It’s not by strength or speed or swiftness of body that great deeds are done,” “but by wisdom, character and sober judgment, said the Roman statesman Cicero almost two millennia ago. And it applies right now, today.

OK, magic and beauty may seem a little harder to locate right now or even fixate on, but it’s because we’ve been focusing in the wrong areas. While discord and frustration may be surrounding us, there are also many small signs of kindness and hope. It’s there in the thoughtfulness a neighbor offers on an evening walk, the time a colleague takes to offer you a reference you need or share an idea that’s priceless. It’s a friend reaching out if she hasn’t heard from you or the connection you made in a virtual meeting that will help you expand on an idea.

As a life-long magician who used to perform straight magic (as opposed to what I do now which is use magic as a fun learning tool when speaking), I

found that regardless of whom I would perform for with my little bag of tricks, the magic would transform them. And here's the thing, I would usually ignore anyone who looked gruff, uninterested or surly. I wanted to only perform for the pleasant people, the ones who would make my life easier.

There was one evening in Manhattan many years ago when I was performing at The Lion's Rock, an elegant little restaurant that I'm sure has been gone for years. I noticed one table with two older women and I swear they were glaring at me, so I navigated past their table and went on to work the room. As I was packing up one of the two came over and ask me if I would please perform for them, they had been waiting all evening.

How often right now with our polarizing politics and frightening epidemic and challenging economy, do we steer past anyone who doesn't think exactly like we do on the issues. If they look like they may disagree or even worse, reject what we're saying, we steer clear. Often those who need our magic the most—our empathy and understanding—are the ones we want to avoid.

We lead where we are, whether we're the lowest person in the company or most senior executive. How we run our lives and our careers has never been more crucial to everyone around us. We can live in fear—there is a Japanese saying that says fear is only as deep as the mind allows it—or we can choose to change how we think and act around others, inspiring them to do the same.

#### Seven Ways to Share Your Magic:

- Smile at everyone- it is transformative, both neurologically and for the energy we spread. Go one step further and write down three things you find humorous or amusing on each day for one week. Research indicates you can increase your overall happiness and decrease depressive symptoms for up to six months by doing that. Here's the thing, we've all heard the saying, "neurons that fire together, wire together," which simply reminds us that if we do

something again and again, we'll get better at it. And who, right now, wouldn't like to feel happier, and pass it on.

- Respond with empathy—one of the fundamental needs of all people is to be understood. In current situations people tend to respond in anger, unleashing all sorts of pent up emotion that can come spewing your way. Instead of what you'd like to say, stop, pause, breathe deeply and then respond back from an empathetic perspective. Language to reply with empathy includes: Sounds as if that's..., I'm guessing you're very frustrated...looks like you're really annoyed...
- Look for the part that shines—instead of seeing the problem person or annoying micromanager, imagine it's your friend, parent or colleague who is misbehaving. What slack would we cut them (usually much more than someone irritating us). We see the uniqueness of our friends and family. And when we respond back negatively, we just continue to perpetuate the circle of frustration, and who has time for that. There's a saying that most people are winners, some are disguised as losers. Don't let their disguises fool you.
- Forget It and Move One—it offers incredible freedom. Life is tough right now, and none of us have the luxury of holding on to old grievances or frustrations. Yes, she shouldn't have said that and no it wasn't nice, but QTIP (Quit Taking it Personally) and put your energy where it is badly needed. I recently talked with a man in his mid-80's, whose brother had been trying to reach him. Last time the brother called this man spoke to him for less than a minute and hung up. He explained he's still angry about not being treated fairly (in his estimation) over how the family estate was shared, so he's never going to talk to his brother again. Now this man is also lonely, he has no relatives and few friends. His life could be incredibly enriched if he allowed his brother into it. What a foolish thing to do, holding onto any grudge like a hobby that should be revisited. Move on.

- Be Kind to You Day—Go get yourself a present. Every class I've taught and everyone I've coached seems to have the same theme: "I can't believe I said it that way or did that, when will I ever learn." All of us mess up, but it's time to change your inner dialogue to something like "It's OK, you learned and you're improving. You did the best you could."
- Listen in a profoundly new way—understanding what is meant, not necessarily what is being said. We all know less than 70% of what is said is retained within 24 hours; we're a nation of lousy listeners. Yet listening to truly understand is still an art and a tremendous gift to anyone you apply it to. Do the following: When you're speaking with someone ask three or four insightful questions based on what is being said, not what you have planned in advance. Don't judge the dialogue, just listen. Imagine what the person is feeling—the emotion- - and is not saying. Listen as if you have to repeat what is meant to someone else.
- Appreciate-it's life-changing. Highly successful people are appreciators. They make lists each day of what they appreciate. They tell people what they appreciate about them. They understand the incredible value of living in a state of appreciation, and under any circumstance can find things that are going well in their lives. Make a commitment to write down five things a day for a week that you are truly appreciative for, and you'll be surprised how many more ideas just keep popping out. Usually at our worst we'll start to see just how blessed we are. And with this mindset we become contagious—we're spreading an attitude of gratefulness to everyone around us.

You make a difference in the world just because of who you are and what you do. Your magic needs spreading. I leave you with this thought:

May I understand that where the materialistic mentality says “Just impossible,” my higher wisdom whispers to me, “What a glorious opening for a fresh vision of how the universe operates.”