

SPEAK *Your* MIND

Your Life Depends on It! by Steven Gaffney

Do you ever worry about the reaction you'll get when you share what you feel or what you know – either at work or at home or out with your friends? Do you wonder whether you'll be respected for saying what needs to be said?

Recently a participant in one of my seminars shared that his wife of more than 25 years told him she was unhappy and wanted a divorce. The worst part about this is that he never saw it coming. He never knew she was unhappy.

Situations like that make it easy to see that honesty is not only about not telling lies. Honesty is really about saying what needs to be said and not withholding information and ideas.

This man's wife may not have been "lying," but she sure wasn't being honest, and the sad truth is that more than a marriage may have come to ruin over it. A study published in July's Psychosomatic Medicine showed that women who usually or always keep their feelings to themselves when in conflict with their spouses have over four times the risk of dying from coronary heart disease.

The Framingham Offspring Study of more than 3,500 men and women asked the participants whether they typically vented their feelings or kept quiet in arguments with their spouse; 32 percent of the men and 23 percent of the women said that they typically bottled up their feelings during a marital conflict. Women who didn't speak their minds were four times as likely to die during the 10-year follow-up period as women who always told their husbands how they felt.

It's not always easy to speak the truth in a marriage, but this study demonstrates that not doing so affects more than just marriages – it affects health. When people withhold their thoughts and feelings, they unwittingly slip into unproductive

patterns in their relationships. This holds true for marriages, committed relationships, friendships, and work relationships.

People self-silence because they're afraid of the reaction they'll get when they share what they feel or what they know. When we reduce fear, we can increase honest, open communication and improve relationships. It requires more emotional energy to keep things inside than to let things out. The key is to create an environment where people feel safe to do so. Self-silencing may not be a problem you struggle with, but other people may withhold their thoughts and feelings from you. How can you help them overcome that? What steps can you take to make the environment safe for honest communication?

That is why my company has been helping to bring honest communication to organizations and families across the world for almost 15 years. We have helped introduce the concept that it is not what people say; it is what they don't say that is toxic to relationships, leadership, productivity, and profitability. The good news is we can do something about it.

Finally, the next time you're working out at the gym or planning a healthy meal, remember that being honest in conflict is another way to contribute to a healthy heart.

Steven Gaffney is a leading expert on honest, interpersonal communication, team performance, leadership, and change management. He has worked with numerous Fortune 500 organizations to increase revenue and drive profit, as well as with many governmental agencies to better allocate resources and taxpayer dollars. Thousands credit Gaffney's seminars, media appearances, books, and products with making immediate and lasting changes in both their organizations and personal lives. He is also the author of two groundbreaking books, *Just Be Honest* and *Honesty Works*, and the co-author of *Honesty Sells*. For more information, please visit www.StevenGaffney.com.