

MORE CHANGE

March 2, 1998 was a day that changed my life on many different levels. I had my first (and only, I trust,) surgery. I have made it well into adulthood without ever have been "under the knife". My surgery was planned as part of my treatment to balance and align my upper and lower jaws. On the Friday before the Monday surgery, the doctors explained what they were going to do. I blankly replied, "Ok". Like so many things happen in our lives, the hearing about something and the doing of something are only remotely related. I had no idea what I was getting into and by the time the surgery was done (5 hours), there was no going back. I had planned to get back to working and training in two weeks. HA! HA! To hold the upper palate and jaw in place they put a splint that covered the upper teeth and roof of the mouth. I could not talk. My face and the area around my mouth were numb. I had to be fed liquids through a syringe. For five weeks, the splint remained. As the feeling came back into face, I now had to learn to form words again. I felt like I was translating from another language, as if English had become a second language I was learning for the first time. I wanted to speak and was not able to form the words clearly enough for most people to understand. In the early stages, I felt retarded. This must be what it is like after someone has a terrible injury or illness and loses the ability to speak clearly. Their mind is still sharp, but their speech or motor coordination is impaired.

This was exemplified by an experience I had during this time. A friend and I had entered a Subway to order lunch. At this time I could eat solid, soft food. I explained to the counter clerk that I wanted a scoop of tuna in a cup. After several moments of listening to me with a blank stare, she look at my friend and, in a surly tone of voice, said, "I can't understand a word she is saying." What must it be like for people who have to struggle with imperfections of speech or physical body due to an accident or illness? The experience gave me a chilling awareness of how we become impatient and frustrated with people who do not have the same abilities as we do.

My trip to Kilimanjaro prepared me for this experience. For the first time in my life, I had to be patient and quiet to allow the healing to take place. I had no idea how long it would take me to heal and I had to make it my number one priority. There were so many things that took up so much of my time as important, now did not seem important at all. It reminds me of the story of the couple who visited a health club. The fee for membership was \$1500.00. "It was too expensive", they said. Three months later, the man had a heart attack. Six months later the couple was back at the health club, gladly paying the \$1500.00 for membership in the hopes of regaining the man's health. What changed? - the perspective in how important his health was.

Hindsight is 20/20. So? The true leader and the highly successful person anticipate change and prepare ahead of time by building their skills, resources and creativity as an ongoing process. The more unskilled a person is in behavioral flexibility, communication and creative thinking in today's changing world, the higher their stress level, the more ineffective they are, and the more likely they are to become victims of their own ineptness. Yes, I had no idea what I was getting into. What I learned from my experience, I would not trade for the world: a great compassion for those who may appear to have fewer abilities than I and how to distinguish between what is frivolous and what needs the focus of my attention now. "There is a time for every purpose under heaven" How true this is for me these days.