Respect What Is Genuinely Yours

by Marie S. Paxson

THIS ISSUE OF ATTENTION MAGAZINE IS ESPECIALLY MEANINGFUL TO ME because it deals

with the topic of disclosure. I was channel surfing one night and paused to watch an interview with Alanis Morissette, who was discussing secrecy versus privacy on the *Tavis Smiley Show*. She described secrecy as something shameful and based on the notion that harm will come to you if you tell, while privacy is respecting what is genuinely yours. I have learned that "yours" can eventually become available to others but only when you are ready. Then you get to call the shots; conversely, you pay the price if you were wrong to disclose.



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The point is that you get to figure things out at your own pace. There have been times when I shared too much information with the wrong people. Those stumbling and false starts are balanced by those moments when I genuinely connected with others. I wish there were a GPS system for this journey with AD/HD. But GPS systems are designed on logic—which, the next time you end up in a cow pasture instead of a shopping center, will teach you to value logic.

I recently called members of my extended family to let them know how unpredictable and troublesome the last few years of my life have been. I would have preferred not to do this, trust me. But with the help of some talented professionals, some nonjudgmental CHADD friends, and some soulsearching, I determined the time was right. I just couldn't attend another bridal shower, wedding, or graduation pretending that my life and my family are on track...like theirs. I respected them enough not to be resentful of their apparent success and

ability to breeze though life. But I couldn't be authentic in their presence. I ended up becoming this fake, phony human being, and with all that AD/HD brings to my life, quite frankly I couldn't keep my cover stories straight. At the end of several evenings when my husband and I commiserated about the whoppers we told, we prayed our family members were too busy to compare notes... because something wouldn't add up BIG TIME.

Amid the usual activities this past holiday season, I attended the funeral of a young woman who had died of cancer at the age of twenty-five. In the long receiving line at her viewing, in addition to the sadness and sense of loss I experienced, something else struck me. There were many, many photos of her in a variety of lifecyle activities enjoyed by young people everywhere—school plays, sports, academic awards, school music programs, extracurricular activities, and proms. This very talented young woman had a large circle of friends. To be perfectly honest



I was also struck by how wholesome and normal her life had been in contrast with my children's lives. They don't take photos of IEP meetings and no certificates are given for your daughter's tenth detention.

A lot of my children's growth occurred during their after-school jobs. They learned to interact with others in a multigenerational, ethnically diverse setting, with a variety of person-alities. They developed their ironic wit (which I really enjoy) and their problem-solving skills. They experienced workplace politics and saw the best and worst of human nature. So they really were doing more than standing at a cash register or tagging dry cleaning. I have very few mementos of this aspect of their lives, however, and it never seemed like something to email my friends or brag about at a cocktail party.

Along the way I have learned that before disclosing any personal issues, I ask myself, "What is my motivation?" If I can't stand the thought of telling another whitewashed version of what I am dealing with because I value my relationship with

the person to whom I am speaking, that could be one reason to be truthful. Another good reason would be if I want to see whether the person has helpful suggestions. But if it is to throw conversational cold water on someone going on ad nauseum about their perfect child...well, that's most likely my problem and I need to work on that.

So here I am—president of a large nonprofit organization that deals with mental health issues—and I only recently told my nearest and dearest that my family is dealing with mental health issues. They have been very supportive and it has been a relief to finally acknowledge the truth. As though disclosing a physical health issue, I gave an overview of the situation and spared them the gory details. If you've ever listened to a detailed account of someone's surgery, you appreciate why I thought this was important.

It really isn't safe to disclose to everyone, however, as highlighted in our issue this month. Run your plans to disclose by an objective somebody before proceeding. ●

Marie S. Payson