



Obstacles to Freedom

by Dr. Nancy Oelklaus

One day last week when my husband opened the front door to get the morning newspaper, a wren flew into our home. Apparently, this small brown bird with distinctive cocked tail had been huddled against the house for warmth. Startled by the door's opening, he flew — the wrong direction.

For the next hour, my husband and I labored to coax the bird to leave. He stayed high, against the ceiling. Quickly, he found his favorite perches — atop the Christmas tree, on the chandelier.

We opened the front door and the back door. We darkened the inside lights and turned on the lights outside, thinking he would be attracted to the outside light. But he insisted on flying higher than the door's opening, remaining trapped.

Once he landed on a window ledge. In the early morning light, I could see the tree branches outside. I wondered if he was attracted by that familiar sight, even though it was not the pathway to freedom. He stayed there for a long time, not even seeing the open door only a few feet away.

My husband and I waved towels to "herd" him toward the open doors. Finally, he tired. In this exhausted state, he lowered his altitude and landed on the kitchen counter. From there, with the last wave of our towels, he flew to freedom.

The wren's choices make a good metaphor for this season of new beginnings. What normally worked for this wren — flying high — was not useful in the new environment in which he found himself. When he

continued to do inside what he had done outside, he remained trapped.

Several principles come to mind as I reflect on my early morning experience with the wren.

People who look like enemies may actually be our teachers, guiding us toward freedom. The doorway to freedom may be close at hand, yet we are drawn to the familiar and exhaust ourselves trying to make the impossible work. Our ego (flying high) is the greatest obstacle to our success. When we are startled, we must stop, look, and listen — or risk flying in the wrong direction. We are attracted to the familiar, even when it does not fulfill our goals and a better choice is in plain view.

I invite you to write out the answers to the following questions before you set new goals for a new year:

1. What, in my external environment, has changed?
2. What is working for me, that I want to keep on doing?
3. What do I want to let go?
4. What do I want to do differently?

Happy New Year!
Nancy



About the Author

With the advantage of a 25-year career in education as a top-level administrator in a school district, as well as entrepreneurial leader of a state education association, Dr. Nancy Oelklaus has been a leader in the fields of organizational development, change, systems thinking, and adult learning. Her national and international experience brings diversity to her work, which is grounded in a knowledge base of the brain and systems thinking. She is the founder of the Success Accelerator Brain Trust™; a nonjudgmental personal development coaching process which builds upon inner strengths and provides solutions for weaknesses.