

# The CHOICE Connection

Positive strategies. Practical solutions.



constructive  
**CHOICE**  
Jean Strosinski, PhD, PCC, CI

*February 2013 - In This Issue:*

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## Quotable Quotes

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." ~ Albert Einstein

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage." ~ Lao Tzu

"Never forget what you are, for surely the world will not. Make it your strength. Then it can never be your weakness. Armour yourself in it, and it will never be used to hurt you." - George R. R. Martin, author of *A Game of Thrones*

Dear Jean,

Our featured writer this month, Ann Lyn Hall, is the Executive Director of CNM Connect at Central New Mexico Community College. CNM Connect is a nationally recognized student retention model in community colleges. She is a national leader in financial coaching, asset building, and helping adults improve educational, employment, and financial outcomes. *CNM Connect is ...*

- *A philosophy of how the local community college works with students*
- *A physical space at each campuses where students can get whatever resource they need.*
- *A group of dedicated staff, faculty and students who come together as a community in service of all students.*

*We believe that there are no wrong doors in which students can access college. Through CNM Connect, students don't experience silos or multiple referrals between departments at the college.*

I met Ann Lyn four years ago when I was invited to participate in a Financial Coaching Literacy program that was being launched throughout the US. I was so very excited to join the three-person facilitation teams reaching out to other communities of support to our working poor in the US. My engagement in this effort and subsequent curriculum development initiatives have proven to be one of the most rewarding experiences I am privileged to be a part of. The spirit of Ann Lyn's passion infuses our work with our training participants. Her talent and gift, in addition to her knowledge of our education systems, is the art of facilitation. You only have to watch her in action to understand the power of great facilitation! Thanks, Ann Lyn, for your dedication to the educational support of our students, young and old, and the learning and insights you bring to your staff and students.

*In the spirit of sharing our gifts,  
Jean*

## **Strong Vision, Strong Students** *by Ann Lyn Hall*

Our current educational system is broken. Or is it?

In the past year, I've seen local and national news portray educational systems with words like failing schools, high drop-out rates, lack of accountability.

None of these headlines gives me much hope.

And I know, that there is a something else going on behind these headlines - that this isn't the whole story.

Our current system is based on deficits. When applying to college, students take a placement test to see what areas are the weakest so that they can be remediated.

As part of an educational reform movement, we currently focus on what is broken. I want us to focus on what is working.

I met a teacher about ten years ago who helped me understand that my perspective on education is very different. I met him at a very large, national educational conference with thousands of participants - all who have a commitment to high quality education.

As he was talking, he called our attention to the table where there was a pair of cheap drugstore reading glasses for every person. This is the pair that was in front of me - they don't make a strong fashion statement. He asked everyone in the room to put on the glasses.

Just like that day, when I put on these glasses, I can't see very well. Things seem to get much larger and are quite blurry. What he said to the room, was that we needed to change our vision to focus on what is strong - what is whole. And as he said this, things became a lot clearer.



This experience reminded what I have always known to be true. Drawing on strengths leads to transformation change.

With these glasses I see schools that are learning how to raise reading scores by four grade levels in six months not a failing school. With these glasses, I see teachers who will do everything in their power to make their students successful not incompetent teachers.

The research supports this. Spending your time improving on an area of strength creates improvements of up to 400% compared to focusing on an area of weakness which creates improvements up to 20%.

In my daily work at a community college, I see this in action. I connect students with the awareness of their natural strengths - so they can grow these. This focus on strengths not only changes our language but also our expectations and outcomes. We'll see schools that meet our students where they are, challenge them to grow and reflect back to them the strengths they already have.

I have a challenge for you today. Change your vision. Focus on what is strong. Together, we'll change the future of education.

## **Tools and Resources**

### **FROM THE BOOKSHELF**

*Strengths Quest* by Donald Clifton and Chip Anderson

The teacher in my reflection is Chip Anderson. His perspective on the world stopped me in my tracks and made me rethink my own!

### **THE INTERNET CONNECTIONS**

[List of Personal Strengths](#)

[The Happiness Institute - Strengths List](#)

[ABQ TEDx ABQ Talks](#) - This site is the depository for the ABQ TEDx ABQ talks. The January sessions which includes Ann Lyn's talk will be uploaded shortly if not already there by the time of this newsletter's publication.

## **Reflection**

At my work at Central New Mexico Community College, I focus on the strengths of the students that I have the pleasure to work with and the employees that are part of the CNM Connect team. It is so easy to have conversations about what is going wrong in an organization or in a person's life -- and sometimes these are critical conversations to have. And, I think that helping people stay focused on their strengths can change the climate of an organization and change a person's perspective on their lives.

When I'm listening to someone, I am listening for their strengths. And, they tell me in EVERY conversation within the first four sentences. After I hear their strength, I reflect back the strength that I've heard. People are typically honored that I really heard them and to see themselves in a glowing light of strength. Hearing our strengths changes the conversation immediately. Sometimes, I ask people to utilize a strength that they've identified in a current situation that they are struggling in. The truth is that this sounds too easy, too simplistic.

I'm going to ask you to try it... listen for the strengths of the next person that you talk with. What are their strengths that they are living?

### Choose To ...

Engage in a reflective activity ... pull out a blank piece of paper ... write down the first words that pop into your head that describe **YOUR** strengths - the places where you rock! ... Spend about five minutes brainstorming this list ... now, take this paper ... fold it up ... and put it in your pocket ...Live these strengths throughout your day ... focus on what is strong ... consider what it is like to spend a day living your strengths ... finally, share your strengths with another ... be the change we need in this world.



### Administrivia

My Constructive Choices Audience...

- \* Professionals wanting to be at choice in their career and daily work,
- \* New managers (and aspiring leaders) transitioning to establish a leadership role in their communities,
- \* Individuals wanting to sort through the choices, build a more fulfilling life, live their voices, and...
- \* Coaches who choose to step out, show up, and say - YES, it IS all about YOU!

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