



“And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”

Nelson Mandela
Civil Rights Activist
(1918-2013)

Have you ever been at a gathering in which the speaker, after waxing eloquently, then asks the audience for participation. “Any questions?” “Any comments?” Moreover, how many times is that invitation marked by absolute and stunning silence? Lots, I think. There is always a risk to “going first”. It is scary. It is intimidating. Sometimes we might not want to be the ones to let our light shine.

It is the middle of the night. You wake up to get a drink of water. But you prefer the darkness. You don’t want to turn on the light because you might not be able to fall back asleep. So, familiar with the house, you decide to stay in the darkness. But then you step on the bone left behind by your dog or the Legos your child was putting together and you scream out. Now, what do you do? Do you persist in the darkness – or do you turn on the light? And if you do turn on the light, what happens? Pain! The first blast of light in the darkness is painful. It forces you to see things you may not want to see. It takes a while to get used to the light. But once you do, you become a person of the light, feeling comfortable and “at one” with the light.

Once you allow that initial risk – to let that light shine, it becomes infectious and others wish to do the same. “You are the light of the world....now let that light shine” (Matthew 5:14-16). Once that first person in that otherwise silent audience raises their hand and responds, oftentimes, many others will subsequently raise their hands to share as well. It takes one person to start. One candle cannot illuminate a dark room – but many candles can. So give others the “permission” to share their light, their gift, and their talents – by creating the space for them to do so. As the kids say, “You first”. “No, you first.”