

GUEST COLUMN

Encouraging words can empower, motivate

In high school I sang second soprano in the choir. Every year, we competed at state events, often walking away with the top prize.

It would not have been possible without our director, Mr. Llewellyn.

Mr. Llewellyn possessed tremendous musical talent, but I remember him most for his ability to encourage.

When competition rolled around, we knew it meant learning an elaborate and complex piece — usually something in Latin.

Mr. Llewellyn never allowed us to hear the piece before handing us the sheet music to sight-read.

On a good day, our first attempt sounded precisely like a train wreck. But when the final note lay quiet, Mr. Llewellyn began working his magic. Striking himself in mock rhapsody, he would declare how



Dayle Allen Shockley

Dayle@DayleShockley.com

marvelous we were.

Could we imagine how awesome this was going to sound? Frankly, no. We were convinced it was hopeless.

But not Mr. Llewellyn. Each agonizing attempt thereafter brought words of encouragement from our director, injecting something invisible into us, convincing us that we were on the brink of knocking his socks completely off!

How is it that a few words of encouragement can make even the weariest soldier feel like taking on the world?

Within a few weeks, we sounded larger than life. And by the time competition rolled around, we burst onto the stage — confident and unwavering. That is how we won competitions.

And it all started with an encouraging word.

Encouragers seem few these days. Parents criticize children who fail to measure up to their standards. Husbands and wives spend grueling hours at jobs, seldom hearing a simple, "Thank you for your hard work," from anyone.

Perhaps you think your few words of encouragement would be meaningless. Think again.

Many years ago, my husband

received a card in the mail. A young woman wrote to say how much he had influenced her life. "It was because of your encouragement," she wrote, "that I ever considered going to college. Thank you."

Today, she is an educator. What might she have done with her life had it not been for an encourager?

It was King Solomon, in the Book of Proverbs, who said, "The power of life and death are in the tongue."

Indeed! Words might not break our bones, but they can break our spirits, leaving us feeling worthless and inadequate.

By the same token, words can empower and motivate, transforming the downcast into the most enthusiastic beings.

Like ripples from a pebble tossed into the quiet waters of a pond, encouraging words awaken

something dormant and silent in the center of an individual, triggering a circle of motion that brings renewed energy and fortitude.

All of us, in a curious way, have the power to shape the future. For every day we decide what words we will speak.

What will we say to our children, to our spouses, to our associates and to our friends? Will we speak words that lift them up, motivating them into overcoming obstacles and fears? Or will we speak words of criticism and contempt, tearing them down, and destroying their ability to believe in themselves?

One thing is sure: Whichever words we choose to speak, the end result will be forthcoming—to bless us, or curse us.

Dayle Allen Shockley is a former Southeast Texan who now lives in Spring.