

# Letting Go of Shame

I just want to be who I am and not worry about what people think. But, dammit, I do.

BY LINDA ROGGLI, PCC

AM IN MY HOTEL ROOM, HIDING BECAUSE I SCREWED UP and was shamed in front of a crowd of people I care about. It's a childish way to handle embarrassment and I know it. But I'm hiding anyway.

The butterflies in my stomach took flight the moment we entered the room where we were to speak. My colleagues reported on their entrepreneurial accomplishments, revenue projections, social media stats, all garnering applause. Then it was my turn. I thought I was doing a pretty good job of faking it—talking around my comparative lack of achievement. The woman in charge asked me a pointed question that filleted me with surgical precision. My façade fell apart. Despite wearing my dress-for-success outfit and careful makeup, I cried. Before an audience.

## I Am Not Fragile, but I Am Tender

I could scream. I had tried to do my best (but apparently didn't), and someone called me on it. I couldn't pull myself together enough to sit there and support other people's presentations. Instead, I fled to the bathroom, curled up on the floor of the handicapped stall (thank goodness no one else needed it), and sobbed like a little girl. Then I escaped to my hotel room to avoid the looks of pity. That's the last thing I want—those condescending, sideways glances that say, "Don't treat her too harshly, she's fragile."

I am not fragile, but I am tender. My sensitive side gets put on the shelf most of the time. Who can survive being bruised again and again by careless comments and cruel jokes that aren't funny? Most of the time, I wear a thick layer of good humor and self-confidence (which, by the way, has become surprisingly authentic). But even when wearing my armor, I can be blindsided by shame.

I knew, even as I sat there in a puddle of tears, that I would regret fleeing the scene. I had overreacted, and soon my overreaction would rise to the level of the shame that caused it. Eventually, I would have to go back into that room.

I wish I could be funny about this. I'd love to have some quick tips to pull myself out of the muck. So I went online to find out what the experts say about dealing with shame:

- 1 Learn to find peace within yourself
- 2 Be deliberate in your actions
- 3 Starve anxiety by dealing with it
- 4 Practice self-control

The list goes on, but I have to wonder: What the devil are they talking about? If I could do all those things, I wouldn't be feeling this way in the first place!

I have always thought that adversity strengthened us by its challenge. But where is my self-control now? Now that the tears are dry, my face is swollen, and my eyes are red, I accept that peace of mind would have helped

in this circumstance. But it didn't come until later, much later than needed.

It's been a bad day. I wish I had some solace, but I can't stand the thought of chirpy little sentiments like "brighter days are ahead." I get tired of trying to make nice with the world, twisting my ADHD self into a socially acceptable façade. I just want to be who I am and not worry about what people think. But, dammit, I do.

## Am I a Fraud Who Has Been Outed?

My heart breaks when I screw up like this. I want to fall through the floor and disappear forever. I could quit and go home, put this behind me and feel justified that it was *their* fault. But it wasn't about them. It was about me.

My fear is that I am really not a woman who makes good on her promises, to herself or to others. Perhaps I am not up to the challenge. Perhaps all my deep secrets are facts: that I am a fraud, a poser, a pretender who has been "outed." Or not.

Maybe I did exactly what I needed to do: wail and beat pillows with my fists and scream (quietly, so as not to bother other guests, of course). I am calmer now. I lost it for an instant; a split second of agony pushed me past the point of sanity and now I'm back.

These emotions that swamp my rational mind need time to wash through me. I give myself permission to have my little (or big) breakdown; the sooner the better, so the aftershocks are blips, not another tsunami. I recognize the false but potent voices of fear. And I survive, to re-engage once again.

I should go back downstairs in a few minutes and collect my stuff. I'll paste on a smile; it's the make-nice-with-the-world thing to do. I can keep it together for a little while, as long as no one else challenges me today. Please, please don't let me do anything else that will shame me. Not today. **A**

LINDA ROGGLI, PCC, is the author of *Confessions of an ADDiva* and co-founder of the ADHD Women's Palooza.

