

“Spring, soft, summer, sun..” For years I believed working on fluency, building up vocabulary and practicing for clear diction could be the only way to improve my English speaking. In particular, pronouncing “S” sounds were difficult for me so I spent much time on them. But, gradually, I noticed there was something very important I was missing. No matter how much vocabulary I learned, or how fluently I spoke, it was meaningless, because I didn’t know how to use the words meaningfully.

To tell you the truth, I am very shy and I tend to get nervous when I try to speak. So even in Japanese, my basic communication skills have been very poor. Here is the typical conversation I used to have with my teacher. “Hello, Megumi! Are you doing okay?” “Yes, Ma’am.” “Did you do your homework?” “Yes, Ma’am.” “Can you say anything other than YES, MA’AM?” “...Okay, Ma’am.” So yes, before speaking English, there was a wall I had to break.

One day my teacher took me to a U.S. Air Base and told me to teach American children how to dance. The choreography was very simple so I thought I had no problem. A few minutes later, I ran back to my teacher saying, “Excuse me, I have a big problem.” She said, “Oh? What seems to be the problem?” I said, “They don’t understand Japanese!” “Of course not!” she replied. “But you have your arms, legs, voice, and brain. You can use all those tools to communicate.” I almost cried because I felt helpless at first. But I tried hard to focus on teaching them using all those tools she mentioned. By the end of the day, all the girls had mastered the steps and we hugged each other. This experience broke the wall completely. I was able to communicate without using many words. All it took was my courage.

Even more recently, I learned something important. That is how simple words can motivate people to understand things positively when there is a message with love. Studying at the civic center one day, I was concentrating on my work so hard that I didn’t realize it was time for us to leave the room. One of the security guards came and said, “I don’t want to rush you, because I know it is not easy. To be honest, it takes me a long time when I want to do something, so I always need to prepare things ahead of time.” As he locked the door, he gave me a smile. I suppose his duty was to maintain the hours of operation, so he could have just said, “Hurry up, it’s time to lock the door!” But instead, he took his time to tell me what’s most important for me. If he just told me to leave the room officially, I would have just said, “Sorry” and left the room and that would have been it. But, his message got me out of the room rapidly and also taught me the importance of the time management. How awesome! I was truly inspired and thought, “ Will I be able to talk like that gentleman if I have the courage to speak from my heart?”

“See, study, speak, success..” I think I am now ready to speak, either in English or in Japanese. Hopefully, the words will come out from my heart. Not just from my mouth.