

## LEADERSHIP

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**QUESTION:** “I have been a support group leader for years and I was surprised how difficult it was to decide what to write in my letter to the editor. Can you help me understand why it was so difficult?”



**ANSWER:** Remember that line in Shakespeare’s *Two Gentlemen of Verona*? The guy is supposed to write a letter for the woman he works for, and he makes such a production of it in his own mind.... Finally she says, “Perchance you think too much of so much pains.” I’ll bet we all do this to ourselves sometimes—think so much about doing something, that we drive ourselves batty.

Maybe the task takes on too much importance. If we’re not used to the job, perhaps it seems to be something out of our league. Could be, a touch of self-doubt creeps in—the “I’m not good enough” feeling that we are sure proves our lack of worth.

Then we start projecting: “Oh man, I’m going to say something that sounds really dumb; I’ll embarrass myself in print; everyone in town is going to see it—what am I doing! I’ll have to change my identity and move to Bhutan!”

Truth is, it’s merely 200 words in the Public Pulse. Editors love letters like this. WE’RE STILL HERE! is something important and real—they get to pass on relevant information. If our letters don’t fit in a space or seem to need a word change, editors will fix them.

We’ll never get all that needs to be said into such a short letter. It’s important to pick only an issue or two—will it be the fact that many polio survivors contribute immensely to their communities? Or a short explanation of the universal need for barrier-free surroundings? Or the significance of everyone’s having access to opportunity, to jobs, to good health care, and to health insurance? Whatever. We can take a look at the suggested issues listed on the PHI website if we’d like help. Focus narrowly. Then go for it.

We must remember to mention the name: the WE’RE STILL HERE! campaign. And the dates: October 14-20. And a brief explanation about why the campaign exists: How about to let the public know who we are? Or to locate additional polio survivors, young and old? Or to educate others about post-polio syndrome? Or to publicize our serious need for health professionals? We’ll find even more great ideas under “A Few Possible Talking Points” on the PHI website.

When I was a kid, I really wanted a decoder ring. Didn’t everyone? As I recall, all I had to do was write twenty-five words about WHY I wanted that ring, send it in to the listed address (could be some box tops were involved as well), and the ring was mine. I labored over that letter for hours. I wanted to say just the right words to convince them I deserved the ring. I didn’t know there’s no such thing as “perfect,” that what really mattered was simply that I wrote the letter. The prize was in the doing—they were going to send me the ring.

Whatever we write to these editors about WE'RE STILL HERE! is going to be fine. We're all bright polio survivors who have dedicated years to post-polio efforts. What we have to say will be terrific. Most of our letters will be published and read—and we'll all be the better for it.

One polio leader I heard from the other day said, "I don't know. What I'm writing about sounds an awful lot like we're tooting our own horn."

Hurrah! Toot away! If we don't take our ideas to the world, who will? This is our big opportunity to let everyone know that we're not those plucky little poster kids any more—we're all grown up, doing our share, and delivering a message that will surely help our communities prosper. Good for us. WE'RE STILL HERE!

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