

*Just Like Chicken**
by Laura Lallone

Give up.

Yes, give up trying to be something streamlined, tucked, professional, more of something, less of something. It's over. It's done. It's so last year.

Be yourself. All of yourself. The world needs more of you.

Under the layers we all speak different languages. We see, feel, and experience different worlds, and, my goodness, we are all a bit sideways. It's a lesson to learn over and over. I learned it loud and clear last Friday night in a very unlikely place.

It was 10 o'clock, and I was doing sit-ups on a bench at the gym—not just any gym, but the original Gold's Gym in Venice, California, the celebrity and [body building](#) Mecca made famous by the Arnold Schwarzenegger classic film Pumping Iron. Already weird, right?

When I rolled off the sit-up bench, I immediately saw that my sweat had made a perfect pattern, like feathers on a rooster. What the heck? My sweatshirt must have folded under me in just the right way. Amazing! It was like finding a French fry that looks like Mother Theresa at a Wendy's in Mobile, Alabama.

A pair of eyes burned through the back of my head. Why not? I was staring and smiling at an empty bench. I slowly turned to find a remarkably handsome man on a bicep machine about 10 feet away. Awestruck about the bench and a bit delirious from the week behind me, I walked over to the man and said, "I know it's strange, but . . . my sweat left a really beautiful mark on the bench." (Gong! Bring in the hook!) The very exotic-looking man tilted his head and sort of nodded. Not knowing what to do and feeling quite ridiculous, I said, "Do you want to see it?" I pointed at the bench. He nodded, said "okay," and walked over to the bench with me.

Of course, thanks to evaporation, there were no signs of my sweat miracle. Smiling and stammering, I said, "Oh . . . I . . . it disappeared. It looked like a rooster." He smiled and said, "Okay, okay . . . I don't speak English that good." (Perfect.)

Most people would have given up. Not me. I was in too deep. I said, "Like a rooster," and made a motion over my head like a rooster's feathers. He nodded and said, "Okay, okay." Then, before I could stop myself I was flapping my arms like wings and clucking like a chicken.

In response to my clucking he just repeated, "I don't know English very good."

He really didn't know English! I was clucking like a chicken at this man in the gym, taking him away from his bicep workout to do heaven knows what. He probably thought he was coming over to the bench to help me move it or fix it or spot me while I was doing sit-ups!

That was my cue, my closing. My work was done. I said "it's okay" about 17 times, smiled, and gathered up my belongings and backed out of the room. The man looked on, seeming very confused as he walked back to his bicep machine.

Lest you think that there was a miraculous sighting that day, I must tell you that I later realized that underneath my sweatshirt I had on a t-shirt with a big decal on the back—which, in reverse, looked like a rooster.

Here's the bottom line.

1. People speak different languages. Okay, sometimes the difference is more subtle than others. When was the last time you misinterpreted someone? How about the last time someone misinterpreted you? It happens all the time. Sometimes, you get really flustered or mad because of the way you're reading someone, only to learn later that he was stressed about getting evicted from his apartment. It had nothing to do with you.

Sometimes, it's you who's misunderstood.

It's easier to stay grounded and neutral if you remember that you're seeing the interaction through your own lens—your own experience, your internal makeup, using your personal history to create the reality. Another person's reality may be, and probably is, really different—not better or worse, just different.

What if you didn't have to change anyone or convince people that your version of the world is more right? What if you were more curious and asked questions to find out where the other person is coming from? What would happen then?

2. Popeye said it best: "I y'am who I y'am." And you are who you are. Yes, it's true. Among all my other qualities, sometimes I'm really "train-wreck" goofy. There, I said it.

Why is this important? Because a couple years ago, I would have tortured myself about how ridiculous I was, clucking like a chicken to a gorgeous man in an oh-so-hip LA hot spot. This time, I just laughed and laughed the whole way home. The interaction was a real marker for me, evidence that I've grown to accept and appreciate more of myself and to accept that I'm human.

What are your markers? How have you grown? Think back 1, 2, 5, or even 10 years. How are you different now? How are you being more yourself?

Now, there is another perspective to consider. What was the man in the gym thinking? Well, he may have been thinking that I was out of my mind. That's always a possibility. He may have been thinking that he really should learn better English. But my guess is that he was thinking that it was refreshing to see someone having a good time, letting down her guard, and being herself in a place that is usually so slick and image-conscious.

At the very least, he has a great story to share over dinner. That is, of course, a chicken dinner. (Gong.)

Have fun. Be yourself. It makes all the difference.

*Chapter excerpt from [*101 Great Ways to Improve Your Life*](#)