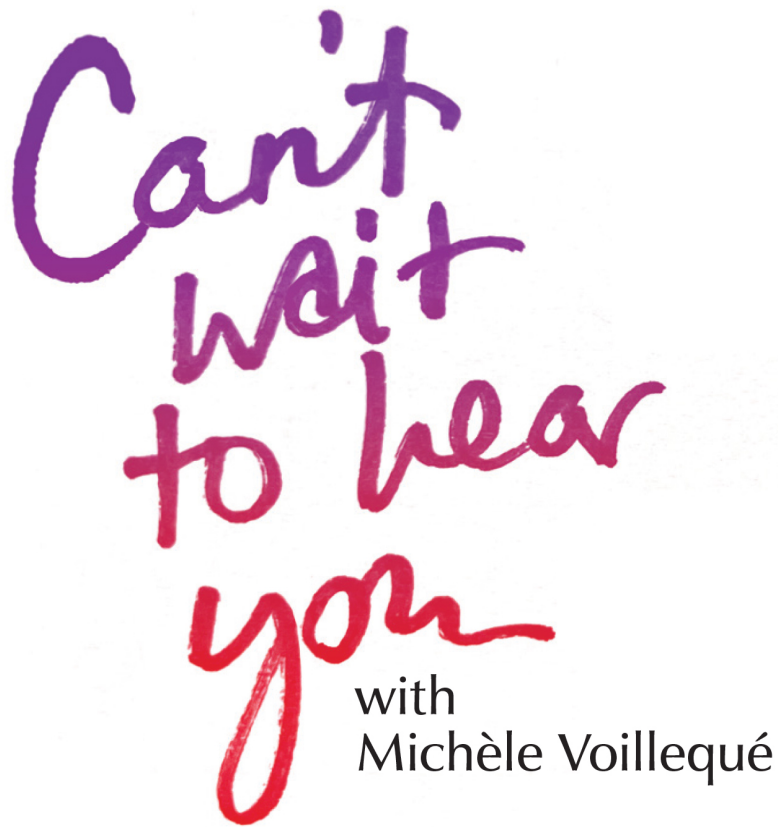


Ep #12: Noticing What Is



Full Episode Transcript

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Your voice is unique to you. It grows as you grow. It changes as you change. If you're curious about the relationship between your voice and your body, your heart and your mind, welcome. My name is Michèle Voillequé and I can't wait to hear you.

This is another episode walking you through part of my framework called Your Whole Self is the Instrument. I'll link to the other episodes in the show notes so you can start at the, in air quotes, beginning if you want.

There really isn't a beginning. It's more of a spiral staircase kind of a thing than a point A to point B to point C kind of a thing. But if you want to hear what I've already said on the topic and you haven't yet, those episodes will be linked below.

Today it's about “noticing what is.” And before I go on, I want to say each of the nine instructions are really broad. Like, there's a lot to say about “noticing what is,” and I'm just gonna touch on a little bit of it today and give you an exercise or two to do to get your feet wet with it.

But this is by no means a comprehensive description of what I mean or what's possible within this instruction. Okay, that's enough abstract stuff.

So, one of the first assignments I give to new students is I ask them to make three lists. I'm going to talk about singing students first, and then I'll talk about speaking students. Speakers, you don't have to wait too long. Don't worry about fast forwarding, and this might be interesting for you, too.

So, the three lists for singers are, number one, a list of songs that you can sing easily and well. And you might think that you don't have any songs on that list at all, but let me challenge you to consider that “Three

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“Blind Mice” is a song, “Happy Birthday” is a song, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” is a song, “So long, farewell,” that’s a song.

These are songs that you could sing if somebody woke you up in the middle of the night and said, “You need to sing me a song right now or I’m going to steal your dog.” That kind of a song. That’s just, you don’t have to think about it.

The second list is of those songs that you sing, you love to sing, and there’s some kind of problem with them, like the chorus is too high, or the bridge is too weird, or the long note at the end is way too long and you just can’t hold it as long as you’d like to. Or you’re fine in the verse until you get to this part, and then it just sounds squeaky or raspy and gross.

And the third list is a list of songs that if you could sing those, you would think you were a “real singer” – aspirational kinds of songs. Maybe you can sing part of them, but you can’t sing enough of them to say that you could “sing” the song, or you can’t sing enough of them to try it at karaoke. and I put real singer in air quotes. I’ve heard people have said that.

“You know, if I could sing that, then I’d really know I was a singer. Then I’d know I had arrived.”

And what these lists tell me, they tell me what kind of music you like. They tell me who you aspire to be. They tell me what’s automatic and easy for you. They tell me how well you’re able to identify what works and what doesn’t work for you. And they tell me how tenacious you are. How easily do you give up on a song? Or, what are you willing to work on?

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So you can imagine that the second group of songs forms our curriculum. Maybe we'll work on those songs and lessons, or we'll work on songs that are like them, or I'll invent exercises or give exercises to you that solve the problems that you're encountering when you try to sing those, uh, number two songs.

The first group of songs, the songs that you can sing easily and well might become part of a warm up routine that we develop for you.

They might serve as a jumping off point for beginning a practice of singing at least one song a day. It can be a 30-second long song. It doesn't have to be epic. You know, it can be a short little advertising jingle if you really like, if there's one of those that you really like. "My bologna has a first name..." I'm sorry for that earworm if I've given it to you.

Now for speakers, it's a similar sort of thing. It's three lists. The first list being something that you feel comfortable talking about without notes. If you're a business owner or a networking type, it might be your elevator speech. It might be your one minute introduction, who you are, what do you do, who do you help, that kind of a thing. Where you don't need notes, you just, something you're ready and able to say easily.

And a list of things, if there's only one thing on it, it's still a list. It counts. Okay.

But the second list are, would be speeches that you might need some notes for, but you're pretty well comfortable with. Maybe something between, I don't know, five and ten minutes long. Maybe even twenty. I mean, it really depends on who you are as a person. But something, that's nearly memorized or that you get a little turned around in. Uh, you get to a part where it's hard to explain. You get to a part where you feel derailed. What's that kind of speaking for you?

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And the third list would be, again, what you aspire to. “If I could do that,” “If I could deliver a 20 minute TED Talk keynote without notes, then I would really know that I was a speaker.”

“If I could give a 10 minute homily and stay in my body and not get freaked out by coughs and sneezes and babies crying in the congregation, then that would be...” Whatever it is for you, whatever that kind of speaking is for you.

So it might be the kind of speech. It might be also how you feel when you’re speaking. And because all of us are comfortable saying some things. in some circumstances, in some environments, and all of us are uncomfortable saying other things in other circumstances, in other environments. And to sort of just suss out for yourself what that is, where those, what those different places are, what those different comfort levels are.

And how this all fits into the instruction of “noticing what is,” is it gives you an opportunity to notice what is. Notice what's easy for you, notice what's hard. Notice what you aspire to. Notice what you're willing to work on. Notice what bothers you about yourself or about the music or about the topic.

Noticing. Noticing what is. So important because this is an important muscle to strengthen because the capacity for self observation is what we need to develop if we're going to get better at speaking or singing. Or maybe better at anything. I find that this is a pretty easy entry point.

There are all kinds of meditation practices that ask you to sit down, sit still, notice your breath, and I know more people who feel like they fail at that than succeed. I'm not saying that that's a, that kind of meditation is a bad thing, just that it seems to be a pretty high bar for most people.

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So when I'm talking about “noticing what is,” I'm asking you to start with the simple things. Simple things like, noticing what you're thinking about when you're washing the dishes.

Noticing whether you can feel your feet on the floor when you're brushing your teeth.

Noticing what the air smells like when you first go outside. What does it feel like? Right now, in North America, it's November. Does it feel like fall? Is it a weird, warm day? Is it still kind of like June? Berkeley's had a few of those lately.

Practicing noticing. And it can be one thing a day. It can take you two seconds. The important thing is to practice.

A big part of “noticing what is,” is about getting ourselves out of the habit of deciding whether we're good or not. To get a little bit more subtle about how we evaluate what just happened.

Rather than, “that was great,” “that sucked,” to, “that measure was hard,” or even deeper than that, “that measure was hard, the second note of that phrase didn't go the way I wanted it to.” Rather than, “the whole thing is bad,” or “I don't have any talent,” or “the phlegm is just ruining my life today.”

Okay, that may be true. The phlegm may be ruining your life today, but did it really ruin the whole thing? Did you really have to clear your throat through that whole speech you were practicing? No, you didn't. You got a little goopy at this point in time. And that's the specificity I want us to cultivate.

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What just happened? What is true right now? Because then we can address it. Then we can work on the specific thing. We can work on the thing that's real. We can work on solving the real problem, not the drama of the problem.

So another exercise I wanna give you is, has to do with that third list, those aspirational things. The songs, if you could sing them, would mean you were a real singer. Or the speeches, if you could give them, would mean that you were a real expert or a real orator, or just, that would be amazing. You would feel like you had arrived. That's a great feeling.

So, what I'm interested in now is what does that feel like in your body when you feel like you've just done something amazing. What is that like in your body? Is it grounded? Is it connected? Is it expansive?

So this is a good time to close your eyes and take a breath that expands the center of your body and put yourself in that situation where you've just sung an amazing song or given an amazing speech.

What do you feel in your body? And this may be trickier than it sounds. It can be hard to identify what you're feeling inside your body, because we're often not clear where that starts, where we start and where other people begin.

So, taking a step back, still with your eyes closed, breathing into the center of your belly, the center of your body, rather, which may be your belly, somewhere in your trunk. Take a breath in that expands your center and imagine sending that energy down your legs into your feet, into the floor.

And take two or three breaths that way, that expand the center of your body and then you send the energy and your awareness down to your legs through your feet into the floor.

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And you can touch the outsides of your legs as you do that to help yourself feel where they are. So your eyes are closed, you feel your legs, and you feel the energy of your breath come in and go down into the floor.

And then without losing awareness of your legs, take a breath that expands the center of your body and let it expand your back, too. Let it expand your upper back.

Let it expand the front of your chest. Let yourself feel really wide and tall at the same time, and imagining your outside edge, being really clear about where is the inside of you and where is all the stuff outside of you.

So if you're sitting at home and if you're not driving a car, take a breath now with your eyes open and see if you can feel that filling the inside of your body, and notice something in the room that isn't you.

It might be the table in front of you, it might be a book, it might be the chair you're sitting on. See if you can give your attention to that space between you and the other thing.

So that you're very aware that it's you sitting there on a chair in front of a table wherever it is and that you are separate from those other things.

And then remember that amazing moment, that amazing feeling that you want to have, when you're singing the song that means you're a singer or giving the speech that means you're a speaker.

And let that feeling fill up your body, noticing that that feeling is filling up your body, and that your body is separate from the other things you identified in the room.

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And if you can, give words to that feeling. So I offered a few before connected, expansive, grounded. Maybe you don't have words for it. Maybe it's more a color or maybe it's more, a thing, another kind of metaphor.

Maybe you feel like a strong tree. Maybe you feel like a blooming flower. Maybe a river. Maybe a rock. I don't know. But what does it feel like to you? See if you can identify it. Give it a name. Give it a descriptor so that you can find this feeling again.

You want to be able to find this feeling again because it's a good feeling and you want to have more of it. You also want to be able to practice it even when you're not singing that song or giving that speech.

You want to practice feeling this amazing as often as you can. And you want to practice feeling your edges, the edges of your body, where you begin and end and where the world begins as often as you can.

So to come back to the discussion of “noticing what is,” rather than an exercise in “noticing what is.” It's really hard to notice what is if you don't know where you are. And it's really hard to sometimes to identify what is our feeling and what's a feeling that somebody else is having.

Like, what actually are we feeling and why? That is not a simple question most of the time. At least in my life. It's not a simple question. “What am I feeling right now? What actually is happening right now?”

And so the, the more you can practice feeling into your own body, noticing where your own body begins and ends, you get to know the inside of your body a little bit better.

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And you can do this in as short a period of time as you want. I don't mean to discount the folks who meditate for, Tens of, dozens of minutes a day, hours a day. I don't know anybody who meditates for hours a day. I do know some pretty dedicated 45-minute-to-an-hour people.

They're great. I think that's wonderful. And that doesn't have to be the goal. You can make a whole lot of progress in 5 or 10 minutes if you're paying attention.

So, again, making a practice of noticing what is around you in the world.

There's a cat fight in the backyard. There is a truck whose reverse beeper just has been going for 30 seconds and I don't know why. Somebody is blocking my driveway. Things like that. Things in the world you can notice. Those are easy, but they're still worth practicing.

And then taking it inside, breathing into the center of your body and noticing your edges. Noticing what it feels like to take in a breath and send that energy down to the floor. To take in a breath and to send that energy across your front, across your back to expand your trunk as much as you can.

You can also take in a breath and send that energy up through the crown of your head and notice what that feels like. There's all kinds of fun you can have with this.

And this is all in service of the moment when you're singing or speaking and something starts to go a little sideways that you're able to notice what's going on rather than panic about what's going on.

You might still panic, but I want you to build the muscle of noticing first, noticing in a nonjudgmental way. Because the judgment isn't

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helping. I, I, I rarely see it, I can't think of an example when I've seen it help, so I don't want to say it never helps. It could, but I think we don't need to practice judging ourselves. I think we're all way too good at that.

I want us to practice noticing, because in that noticing – have you figured it out yet? – there's a lot of compassion.

There's a lot of allowing. There's just noticing what's going on. We're not judging anything. We're not trying to get rid of anything. We're just trying to figure out what's here. What are we working with? What is going on?

And the answer to that sometimes may be, “I have no idea what's going on.” But more often than not, you will know something that's going on.

You will notice something that's happened or is happening. Or is moving, is feeling, is grabbing, is pushing, is limp, is exploding, is free, is stuck. That's the muscle I want us to build.

I really hope this has been helpful. And it really means a lot to me to hear from you whether it is or not. So please do let me know. Thank you so much for listening.

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