

Ep #27: Committing to a Year

Can't
wait
to hear
you
with
Michèle Voillequé

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.

It's been more than a year now since I thought of starting a podcast, and got some coaching to help me with it, and found a producer to help me with it, and started recording episodes. And it's been quite a year. So I've been reflecting on that a bit these last few weeks.

So I want to talk about committing to something for a year, what that's been like for me specifically this year, but also what's it like to commit to something for a year with your voice.

One of the things I tell people – it's on my website, I say it in person – is that it takes about five months of working on your voice to really see any durable, lasting change in how you're using it.

Because these are muscles that we use most of the time automatically, it just takes a while to learn how to do things differently and to make that change sustainable.

It takes a lot of effort to do something differently at the beginning or to do something new at the beginning, but after about five months, I see that most of my students achieve some level of automaticity with some element of the project.

I love it when students are willing to commit to a year. And I, myself, with voice lessons have committed to, and now I have to do math, uh, like 30 years I've committed to voice lessons. Not all with the same teacher.

And not all at once. If you'd asked me 30 years ago, “Are you committing to 30 years of voice lessons?” I probably would have run

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from the room. I was, at the time, committing to “a few,” to seeing, “Will they help? Am I teachable? Is there something here for me to learn, that makes sense, that I can hang on to?”

As I moved from one city to another, from one teacher to another, from one chorus to another, I just stayed committed. I found, “Hey, private voice lessons are, are helping, and I should stick with that.”

So they've now become something that's as essential as grocery shopping, putting gas in the car. When I was seeing a psychotherapist, as, you know, regular as therapy.

So commitment doesn't happen all at once. I mean, we notice, I find, it's often easier to notice our commitments by looking backwards. By looking at the state of your life now and seeing therefore what we must have been committed to, to be where we are now.

So while it was never a conscious decision, “I'm committed to voice lessons,” at some point I found that they just became a non-negotiable.

I want to give you an example in a different realm of commitment, um, that's health related. I have a friend, dear friend, tall, skinny guy, never has to worry about his weight. He can eat whatever he wants, you know, he's kind of irritating in that way.

And, several years ago, he went for his annual physical and he got his blood work done and the blood work came back and he, the number for his, for A1C, the 90 day blood sugar, um, he came back pre-diabetic.

I don't think that they wanted to put him on medication right away, but they definitely wanted to send him to a group for counseling about how to eat and to really get him to change his diet.

It was a big deal and it was like, we're gonna do this first, and if this doesn't work, I think then they were gonna try medication, but it was, it

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felt like a big intervention at the time. It felt like, “Wow, I really need to pay attention!”

And he committed at that moment, right, at that time, to paying attention to his diet. And sure enough, I don't know, six months later, whenever they re-did the test, the numbers were back down in the normal range.

That just blew his mind that he could change his body that much by changing his diet, by committing to paying attention. And then time rolls on, and he would say that he was being “really good,” in air quotes, paying attention to his diet. And then it was just like, “you know, this feels a little too restrictive,” and he started to loosen some things up.

And then, you know, the next time they did, you know, his blood work, it came back and the number was a little higher. It wasn't pre-diabetic again yet, but it had definitely gone up and he was able to look at that and say, “Oh, okay, well, I guess I better tighten it back up again.”

So he's been on this path of committing to making a radical change and then loosening it up, and just now experimenting with how loose he can be and still have his numbers be good.

So he's not committed to the same, uh, set of decisions that he was at the beginning, like a really restrictive diet, but he is now committed to paying attention and to respecting the consequences of his behavior in a way that he wasn't before.

And so that kind of commitment – I feel like when I'm asking students to, recommending that they commit to five months, at least five months of lessons, I feel like sometimes that can land with a person like, this is something really heavy, that this is something complicated. This is something intense. This is something that's going to require a lot of work.

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And commitment certainly can be that way when you're trying to make a radical change in your diet, it feels that way.

And, also, commitment doesn't have to feel that way. For voice lessons, it doesn't have to feel heavy. It can just be as simple as, "I'm making time for this."

"I'm exploring ways that I can practice at home and feel comfortable practicing at home."

"I'm open. to new performance opportunities. When people ask me to sing, I'm going to say yes, and I'm going to look for opportunities to sing. So I might consider joining a chorus, whereas I haven't before."

So commitment can have softer edges, right? can be an easier thing.

But if you look at the last year, and you haven't done anything with your voice, but it's kind of on your bucket list, right – you wanna sometime... you want to figure this singing thing out, or sometime you want to work on not getting so nervous at work when you have to give a presentation, or sometime you want to just enjoy the sound of your voice a little bit more, right? But you haven't been. You haven't worked on it yet.

Well, until now, you've been committed to not making time for it. So you have been committed to something. I say this for those who say, for someone who might say, "Oh, I just don't do commitments. I just can't, I just can't do commitments."

If you have a calendar, you have some commitments.

If you have a job, you have some commitments.

You have committed yourself to something.

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You've committed yourself to an address. assuming you're housed, you have a street address, you've committed yourself to a phone number, to an email address. You've made decisions that you've stuck with, and they have become part of just like the background of what it is to be you.

For me, obviously, 'cause I'm a voice geek, that's what voice lessons became, have become for me. It's just something that goes on in the background that's part of who I am.

And the foreground, right? 'Cause I do perform, I'm not unconsciously wandering through my voice lessons. They're the highlight of my week, the lessons I take for myself.

So when I think about what it is to commit to something for a year, thinking back for myself about this podcast, uh, it did feel scary. It did feel kind of heavy. I did need coaching.

I reached out to Natalie Miller. I'll put her contact information in the show notes. She was running a small group program, I don't even remember what the program was called, but in my memory it was, "Okay, you're going to do this thing. You're getting help from this coach so that you can launch this podcast already because you've been thinking about it for far too long. You just need to do it. You just need to press go."

And in the course of that program, I found my producer, K. O. Myers. He's always linked in the show notes. And that relationship over this last year has provided a lot of helpful, easy accountability for me.

Partly because I'm paying him to produce the show, and I want the show to come out every other Friday, which means that I need to get the audio to him no later than Tuesday in order for that to work out, you know, easily.

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Some episodes have happened with less lead time than that, but like pretty much we agree for my schedule anyway, it's really convenient to record over the weekend and then send it to him.

And, but, like, knowing that it's not just on me to do this thing. If it were just on me, if I were self-producing, it wouldn't happen because I do not enjoy spending time on my laptop.

I do not enjoy looking at sound waves and figuring out how to make things neat and pretty-sounding. I just want to be able to say the things and send them off.

And then I get a rough transcript back from him, which I clean up and turn into a PDF file for people to download from the website if they want. And I post it on my website. I make a blog post out of the episode. So there's a lot that I'm doing myself, but I'm not doing the audio editing.

And so just having that, really, one other person as a partner in this project has been incredibly helpful to keep me going.

Getting graphic design help for the logo. I started rebranding my website at the same time and that process did help the podcast in a way. I mean, the website rebrand and redo was a huge project that felt like it took, that did take a lot of energy and a lot of creative effort, but that also fed into the podcast and what it is that I wanted to say, you know, I was engaging that question all the time, “What's really most important, what's really top of mind?”

So, my web designer was another accountability partner, sort of tangentially for the podcast. And yeah, finding a graphic designer who immediately understood what I wanted for a logo. That just felt like a great big yes from the universe. Just to hear somebody else, say, “yeah, you're not, no, that's not crazy. I like that. Let's do that.” That felt really good.

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And also having friends and having students – because some weeks I've been stuck. I've been, “I don't know what I should talk about this week. I have no idea.”

I haven't gone down the rabbit hole of, “Why should I bother, nothing I have to say is important. This is all terrible.” My brain hasn't done that since I've started actually publishing podcasts, but my brain spent years in that before I committed to doing it.

Once I committed to launching the podcast, the self-doubt and self-deprecation that had plagued me for years before I actually committed just evaporated. And I committed to, I don't know, did I commit to a year?

I think in my head I kind of committed to a year, but it's not like I'm in a process of re-deciding now. Now it's just, we're just going to keep going until we're not. It's become part of the background of my everyday life. It's just something that's going to happen and that feels really good.

So things about the podcast that were heavy lifts at the beginning: just lots of anxiety, did I have the right microphone? Did I have the right room? Did I have the right, computer program, all of that.

KO and I talked about it on a zoom meeting, tried things out and he said, “Yeah, you're, you're kind of good to go. You're, the equipment's fine. Use, record in Audacity, send me a WAV file.” And you know, I'm uploading that to a Google drive folder. It's not complicated.

So my imagination had made this all a lot scarier and technically threatening than it actually turned out to be.

Thinking about comparing this to voice lessons and needing an accountability partner, certainly your teacher is that, and lessons on the calendar are that.

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Most teachers I know keep a pretty consistent calendar. Like we want to know, "do you want to come every week? Do you want to come every other week and what time and let's schedule those." Right?

Cause that just, it makes our lives simpler when we know, who we're teaching and when. So we're going to be asking students to schedule, X number of weeks out, or to pick a rhythm that we can settle into.

And that helps me as a student to know, well, "How long do I have to practice between now and then to try to integrate this new way of doing things?"

And it's also in the back of my mind, again, as a voice student, if something's bugging me about my voice or a piece of music or my learning process, like something's hard, whatever, I'm frustrated, I know that there is a time when we can check in.

I know that there's help available, coming up. There's an appointment coming up, and so I don't need to obsess about it unless I want to, because there will be a time to ask questions. There will be a time to sort out this thing that feels hinky, you know? We can work on it.

And so having that other person, having a lesson, having a trusted resource calms my nervous system and keeps me engaged in growing and changing.

Intellectually, we all think growth and change is a good thing, but practically most, a lot, we hate it. It's hard. It's not always fun. And so that teacher-student relationship, I find it's just vital that it be good and open and honest and caring.

Other accountability partners you might have, though, are the people you live with, the people you sing with, the people who want to hear you sing, the people who want you to give the TED talk already who can

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ask, you know, “How's it going?” or “What are you learning now?” or “Let's sing a song!” or “Tell me about this thing.”

So sharing your project with other people – if I hadn't told my students or told anybody that I was recording a podcast, they wouldn't be able to ask me about it. “How's it going?” And I wouldn't be able to ask them, you know, “Hey, what do you want me to talk about?”

So sharing this thing that I'm committed to helps it to continue, too.

And I find that when a commitment is scary, when a new step feels like it's going to make a huge change in your life, whatever it is, like you're, you're resisting taking the step because you think it will, part of you is afraid it will upend absolutely everything, when you can share that with other people, it gives it a broader context.

Keeping things to ourselves tends to magnify them in importance and in dread.

So I would say if you're considering committing to something for a year, or if you're considering starting something new, find a trusted partner, tell your friends and family, the supportive ones, not the negative Nellies. Don't tell them. You don't need them squashing your joy.

And have a list of reasons for yourself why this is important to you and what you hope to get out of it.

For me and the podcast, I really wanted to get over myself. I really wanted to, stop the negative self-talk of, “It's all been said before. The internet is full of crap. Who needs anything more in it?”

You can fill in the blank. It was just, the thoughts were so unhelpful, they're embarrassing, and I'm happy that I can't really think of them clearly anymore. Like, they're hard to come up with because they've left. So I succeeded in that, and I'm very proud of that.

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So I wanted to get over myself. I also wanted to make progress on a book that I'm writing. I started a book for adults. I'm trying to, um, yeah, see, it's hard to talk about...

I've started this book several times and I've approached it in several different ways and it was just stuck. And I thought, you know, part of why this book is stuck is because you're trying to talk about singing. You're trying to talk about the voice, which is an aural medium, by writing it down, and that's just hard. How about you talk about the voice by talking and see what you get?

So the podcast is also a project to help me get all the ideas out of my head, onto paper, at least in transcript form, and then figure out what kind of book it will be for adults at some point. We're not there yet, but we're on our way.

And I think the third thing that I really wanted for the podcast was to create, a 24/7 version of me that could be helpful to my students. So if they had a question, they wanted to know what I would think about something, they wouldn't have to wait until their next lesson.

And of course, I can't possibly record that much to answer everybody's imaginary question that they may have or dread they may wake up with in the middle of the night, but it could be something that could feed people in between lessons and provide encouragement and information to keep going.

Because your voice is important. It's important that the world hear it. I care, again, "can't wait to hear you." Really true! I can't wait to hear you and to provide support for people so that they can make themselves more comfortably heard in the world, however, they want that to be.

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So to sum up, there are at least two ways to commit to something, in a hard and heavy way, and in a soft and squishy way. And I, there's probably a third way that's a little bit of both.

When you're making a commitment to do something, to try something new, have a partner, whether it's a paid professional or a dear friend, have somebody who can help you be accountable, and who can help you get to where you want to go, can teach you the skills you need, can help you take that next step easily.

And tell your friends, tell supportive loved ones that you are making a change. You're gonna make a change. You're gonna take a new step. I hear Yoda, “Do or do not, there is no try.”

There's a lot of trying in learning how to use your voice differently. I use try, I do use “try.” I'm not a “‘try’ is a bad word” kind of person. But tell your supportive friends that you're making a new step. Even if it's small, you're having a new beginning. Share that with them so they can support you.

And have a clear list of reasons why you want to make this change. Why you want to take this step. What do you dream that will be on the other side?

When I started this podcast, I wanted to feel differently myself about my own work. I wanted to help my students and I really didn't think about numbers – how many downloads, how many people I've reached. I haven't advertised it.

I didn't have a quantifiable goal with the podcast when I started. I just wanted to be engaged in the process of doing it. And if you're looking at something like committing to voice lessons, or wanting to add voice lessons to your life. That's a perfectly fine way to think about it.

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“I want to be engaged in the process of going to a regular voice lesson and seeing what I learn.” That can be enough.

You might want a quantifiable goal – learning five new songs, connecting my head voice to my chest voice (that is a quantifiable goal. It's going to take longer than five months or a year, probably, but that is quantifiable).

To sing a particular song well, to be ready to perform at somebody's wedding or the karaoke night.

And I come back to, it's enough of a goal to just want to feel better, different, more confident.

I really hope this has been helpful. Let me know what you're committing to. Thank you so much for listening.

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