

Ep #29: My Top 5 Tips for Speakers

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.

My last episode was for singers, my top five tips for them, and I promised top five tips for speakers, and here they are. I'm beginning with where the singers episode left off...

Number One: **your whole self is the instrument.**

It's really easy when we're speaking. to think that it's all happening in our head, that our body doesn't have anything to do with it, that the success of this endeavor is, "How well am I thinking? Am I thinking clearly?"

And maybe you notice if your mouth is dry. Maybe you notice if your throat feels tight. But for the most part, you don't notice the rest of your body. And so Number One, **your whole self is the instrument**, all the way down to your toes.

Your physical connection to the earth and to your core abdominal strength has everything to do with how much vocal power you're able to access.

And how present you are – so this is about maybe your heart, maybe your soul – how present you are with the people you're speaking to has everything to do with how well you're able to communicate your ideas.

So the more integrated your body is with your mind, and your heart, the more cohesive you are as a person, as a *being* in the moment of your speaking, the more cohesive and coherent your message will be.

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So Tip Number One, **your whole self is the instrument**. And the corollary that was present in the singer's episode, **you are bigger than you think you are**.

It can help enormously to stretch your body before you try to give a presentation, say anything important. Even as you begin your day to stretch and feel that there is width across your shoulders to stretch up and feel that there's a distance between your hip bone and your armpit, to create some space, especially in your trunk so that your ribs can expand, not just to the front, but also to the back and to the sides.

That will help you speak with more clarity – auditory clarity – and holding a larger space for yourself, they've proven actually increases confidence.

I don't know if you've read the stories about the superhero posture, putting your hands on your hips and having your elbows out to the side, how that increases confidence in just ordinary people.

So, finding that bigger body is essential to the project and it's something that you need to do every day. Or it's made easier if you can find it every day instead of, 14 days of slouching and then it's time to be on and all of a sudden you need to find a larger body to contain your ideas, to send your ideas through.

That's really difficult, to make that switch, but if you can stretch a little every day, remind yourself in little moments that **you are bigger than you think you are**, when it comes time to be “on,” in air quotes, you'll be naturally more supportive for yourself.

Tip Number Three is **breathe before you start**.

So if you're following the tips in order, **your whole self is the instrument** – you've established a connection to the earth and to your heart.

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You're bigger than you think you are – you're holding yourself with not an extreme posture, but a good, healthy, upright posture. The next thing is to breathe. **Breathe before you start.** Take a breath before you start speaking.

Of course, you're automatically taking breaths before you start speaking, currently. What I mean is, take an intentional breath before you start.

Most of us have a thought and then we just go and maybe we have enough air, maybe we don't, but we don't often typically take time to breathe and then speak.

And part of the worry with that is that there isn't time. There's a conversation running along and you need to jump in right away. You need to find your moment and say what it is that you need to say.

Or you're giving a presentation and you've only been given a certain amount of time and you feel that you need to speak quickly in order to get everything in, or you need to speak quickly in order to be understood as an authority or as an expert.

It will all go better if you **breathe before you start**, inhaling into an open space, into your body, rather than just pressing forward out your chin.

A lot of vocal tiredness and vocal tension comes from unconsciously constricting your throat and having a very small space in the mouth.

So, head, neck, jaw, throat tension helps the voice get tired faster. When you can breathe first, I'll try, I'll make an audible breath for you. When you breathe first, your mouth and your throat are naturally more open. Your voice will get less tired and you'll speak with a better tone.

And for those who are worried about not having enough time or needing to jump into a conversation, needing to interrupt someone, whatever,

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like needing to get into something quickly, breathing when you're in person is something that other people notice.

When you can take an intentional inhalation, the other bodies in the room will know that you're about to say something or maybe you're thinking something and you haven't quite found the words for it yet.

You will notice that people will stop for you. They will wait for you. Your breath is an indicator to them that you're engaged and that you're ready to participate.

And I should say, thoughtful conversation partners will, will take that as a cue. It may feel like a blind leap of faith at first, but I, encourage you to try. **Breathe before you start.**

Tip Number Four: **connect that breath to your trunk and your feet.**

So if you're sitting in a chair and your seat is in a seat and your feet are on the floor, or even if they're not, as you take a breath, make yourself aware of the connection between your body and the chair.

You can do that right now. Take a breath in and feel yourself connect with the chair, all the places that your body is touching the chair, but especially your bum.

And if your feet are on the floor while you're sitting in the chair, add that next. Take a breath. Feel your body in contact with the chair and feel your feet increase their contact with the floor or notice how your feet are touching the floor.

When you're standing, the same thing. Every time you take a breath, see if you can notice your feet and their relationship to the floor. As I said before, **your whole self is the instrument** and how well you're able to connect with your audience will have everything to do with how present you are to your instrument, to your whole body.

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And so using that breath as a moment to pause, reset, “Am I still here? Have I, have I taken off in some way? Am I no longer in my body?” This happens when people speak in public. This happens in ordinary conversation. Well, maybe not ordinary, maybe highly activated conversation.

It's really common to lose track of your body and again, become just a mouth with a brain. You no longer even feel your neck. So taking a breath, connecting again your body to where it is in physical space makes world of difference.

I know I keep saying that, but it is true.

And then after you've taken that air, so you've breathed before you start, you've used that breath to notice your body in the chair, your feet on the floor, yourself in space.

Then, send that air toward the people, not in a forceful way, but just with the intention that you've taken in this breath, and out is going to come this message that is going to reach them, whoever they are, at whatever distance they are from you.

So that it's not just words dribbling off your chin onto the table or onto the lectern, but that you're sending those ideas toward the people you're trying to reach, toward the people you're communicating with.

And Tip Number Five, **all of this is so much easier when you can have a relaxed jaw and a relaxed tongue.** It is a big part of how we speak to set our jaw, to gesticulate with our chin, to lean our head forward, even, you know, to pull our head forward off the top of our spine, to make a point, to inject ourselves into a conversation, to make sure that we're heard.

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We accumulate a lot of tension, we can accumulate a lot of tension as we speak, simply by trying to make ourselves understood.

That jaw tension, those, those behaviors may help a little bit to be understood, but in the long run, they're inhibiting your message rather than helping it, because they are contributing to vocal tiredness and, you know, extra tension is a kind of disconnection.

The more tense your jaw, the less connection you probably have to your feet, because when you're connected to your feet, it's more easy to be aware that, your hips are over your feet and your ribs are over your hips and your head's on the top of your spine, and then you're in good alignment.

And when you feel the joy of good alignment, it feels awkward to lean yourself forward, to jut your head forward, and to have a lot of tension in your jaw.

So one way to work on your jaw tension is with massage. Just physically touching your jaw hinge and feeling around for tender spots and just becoming aware that they're there and maybe gently massaging them.

Another way is to just look in a mirror and let your jaw hang. And see how open your mouth can be, and notice what it feels like when your mouth is that open.

And if you have your hands gently on the sides of your face as you do that, you can start to feel where exactly it is that you might need to practice letting go.

Another way to work on jaw tension and also tension in your tongue is to practice tongue twisters. And so there will be a link in the show notes to take you to some of them, so that you can give them, give them a try. – all of this by way of waking up your mouth so that it's easier to say the things that you need to say.

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Okay. Review from the top.

Your whole self is the instrument.

You're bigger than you think you are.

Breathe before you start.

Connect that breath to your trunk and your feet, and

Relax your jaw and tongue.

Those are my Top Five Tips for Speakers. I really hope they help. Let me know. And, thanks so much for listening.

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