

Ep #33: When You're Freaking Out

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.

If you've been following this podcast for a while, you'll probably notice that I talk a lot about emotion. Emotions are real. They're big, they're important, and they really affect how we use our voice and how we present ourselves in the world.

And today I want to share with you a couple of sentences that have come into my life over the years that have really helped me to regulate my emotions.

I looked back through earlier podcast episodes and I don't think that I've mentioned these yet, which is a little strange because they feel so foundational to how I maintain or create a sense of well being. But, no time like the present, so here we go.

So the sentences are from two very different sources, but they are, “Breathe yourself bigger,” and “Smell the soup, cool the soup.” Smell the soup, cool the soup.

The first sentence, “Breathe yourself bigger,” was an instruction a therapist gave me as we were doing work together and when I would start to feel extremely dysregulated, very upset, very afraid of a memory, of something in my psyche, she would tell me, “Michèle, breathe yourself bigger.”

And I don't know if it's because I'm a singer and I think a lot about breathing anyway, but I could do that. I could do that. I could breathe myself bigger.

Ep #33: When You're Freaking Out

I couldn't make the painful memory go away. I couldn't reframe the scary thing that I was wrestling with. I couldn't do anything intellectual to save myself from this discomfort, but I could “breathe myself bigger.”

And so that may land with you in an esoteric way, where in your mind's eye, you can see your physical self growing larger than whatever it is you are worried about or afraid of.

“Breathing yourself bigger” like they tell you when you see a mountain lion, you're supposed to make yourself as big as possible. Raise your arms above your head, wave your arms, make yourself big and scary. You can breathe yourself bigger in that way in your mind's eye.

And why the instruction worked for me is because I think a lot about how the lungs work and how breathing works for singing. And you can actually breathe yourself bigger by breathing into your chest, feeling your ribs expand, feeling the distance between your hip and your armpit increase.

You can breathe yourself bigger emotionally, spiritually, psychically, and you can breathe yourself bigger posturally. And even that small change in posture has a positive effect on the nervous system.

For me, it's enough to pull me out of a state that is "fight or flight" and closer to something that's more “centered me.”

So “breathe yourself bigger.” When I've been really upset, it's taken several times of saying that sentence to myself, making that suggestion to myself, reminding myself that a larger version of myself is available right now if I would only breathe myself bigger. I can breathe myself bigger.

Ep #33: When You're Freaking Out

So that's the first one I invite you to try if you're feeling freaked out.

And the second sentence came from a friend. I was on my way to a dentist appointment, a dentist appointment I was not excited about. I've never been excited about dentist appointments. Maybe you have, or maybe you can relate.

And yeah, I was not happy to be going. I was going to have a long procedure. It was not going to be simple. And I had a lot of anxiety about it. I was upset that I needed it... I was not a happy camper.

But I was still driving myself to the appointment, and my friend texted me, “smell the soup, cool the soup, smell the soup, cool the soup,” and that's what I kept going through my mind, all through that procedure, and it really did help.

Why did it help? It's breathing. To smell the soup, you're inhaling, right? Cooling the soup, breathing out. Smell the soup, breathing in not just breathing in, but breathing in something delicious.

Breathing in something that is nourishing, breathing in something warm and comforting and good for you and homey and safe and lovingly prepared and full of vitamins and protein and something that's just going to make your whole body feel amazing.

You haven't even taken a spoonful yet, but you smell the soup and you just know that there is goodness in the world, that you are whole and complete and fine. Oh, so fine.

And then you cool the soup, exhaling. A nice, calm exhalation. You're not trying to blow the soup across the dining room table. You're just

Ep #33: When You're Freaking Out

trying to cool the soup, maybe cool the soup on your spoon before you take a spoonful into your mouth. “Smell the soup, cool the soup.”

You might not feel yourself getting bigger as with “breathe yourself bigger,” but what is happening there with smelling the soup and cooling the soup – you’re bringing awareness to your breath, the gentle expansion of your lungs and your ribcage.

And again, this is calming to the nervous system, physiologically calming. It's not just woo. It's not just throwing pink paint over something and pretending, “It's fine. I'm not bothered. It's okay.”

Both of these sentences are engaging your body in calming down, getting you back on your own side.

When you feel like you want to jump out of your skin and run down the block and never come back again, breathing yourself bigger and smelling the soup and cooling the soup help you stay in your body, stay present to what is, and keep you functioning from your smartest, most loving place.

Smarts and love may feel very far away, but I guarantee if you don't have a calm breath happening for you, they're really gone.

When you can get a calm breath happening, either breathing yourself bigger or smelling the soup and cooling the soup, you have much better odds of saying or doing the thing that will create safety, create ease, that will support a good performance, whatever that might be.

The performance might be surviving this conversation without saying something you know you're going to regret. And I would say that both of

Ep #33: When You're Freaking Out

those sentences have been useful in difficult conversational moments for me in my life.

Obviously, the way to figure this out for yourself is to try it. And the good thing is, because these are sentences, nobody else has to know. This is just something you can hold in your own mind, an instruction you can give your own self to make the current moment a little easier.

I know this is a shorter-than-usual episode, but I think the thing now is just for you to try it. I'm not sure I need to say any more.

When you're feeling freaked out, try this sentence: breathe yourself bigger. I can breathe myself bigger. I am breathing myself bigger.

At whatever pace you like.

Or, try smelling the soup.

Smell the soup, cool the soup. Smell the soup, cool the soup.

I hope you have a great day.

Thank you so much for listening.

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Ep #33: When You're Freaking Out

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