

Ep #73: Expanding Our Capacity

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.

Today's episode is part three of Leading When You're Not In Charge.

We've talked really briefly about knowing what you value, imagining how you want to spend the rest of your life, and also very briefly about how your presence, how your being in the world affects and changes the behavior of those around you.

And today I want to talk about expanding your capacity, because in the last episode, I suggested that one of the things you might practice is getting in touch with what you love about any particular situation you may find yourself in, or about any particular thing in the world, and to make a practice of bringing that love up and out of you and into the world.

How can you be in touch with what's important, what you adore, what you find beautiful, meaningful, inspiring, and how can you bring that forward into the world?

And for me, a really natural question after hearing that suggestion is, “I don't have the energy for that. I'm tired. I'm frustrated. I don't have capacity for that. I don't think that's gonna help.”

There's a lot of resistance that can come up upon hearing that suggestion. It comes up in me, too. So I wanna talk briefly about how we expand our capacity for bringing love up, for tolerating discomfort, for tolerating conflict, managing conflict, and just generally making it through situations that are not a hundred percent rosy and perfect.

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I think a really good place to start, the place that I start is with the thought that I belong wherever I am, whether I'm home alone or in a chorus rehearsal, driving on the highway, out in the world, doing my shopping.

Expanding my capacity starts with believing, knowing in my bones that I belong.

And that might be enough right now. I mean, this might be a point when you turn off the podcast and you go contemplate that because it feels big and a little heavy, a little complicated, as I say it.

Let me give you an example from a chorus rehearsal.

One of the things that's true about rehearsals, but also about performance opportunities is that we're in confined spaces, right?

Sometimes the room is, feels big and generous, big enough for everybody, and sometimes it really doesn't. Sometimes rehearsal spaces are cramped. Sometimes at performances, you're standing on risers and you know you're all much closer together than we normally are, and there can be all kinds of discomfort happening with that.

The room is stuffy... but what I want to talk about right now is maybe there isn't room to open your folder.

We're all packed in like sardines, and if you're in the middle of a row or in the back row, sometimes there isn't enough room even to open your folder. That's a situation that needs to be addressed.

You can't sing well when you've got your ears around your shoulders and your arms glued to your sides, right? We all need space around, a certain amount of space around us in order to sing well.

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And it's possible to be in that kind of cramped, uncomfortable position and feel like, "Ugh, there are just too many people here. They don't need me. I don't belong. This is a pain in the neck. I don't know why I decided to do this," – to go down that spiral, that downward spiral.

And there's some part of you that knows that's useless, that's not helpful, and it's also not true. And, depending on your mood and your blood sugar or how thirsty you are, you might find your brain taking you there – "I just don't belong here. This is not for me. I can't do this," when we know that you're there because your voice matters.

You're contributing to the group. You enjoy this time with these people. You enjoy this music. This brings meaning into your life and friendships and connections and art, and this is something that you really want and you're standing, say, in the back row and you cannot breathe.

That's where the capacity comes to recognize, "I belong and I need to speak up, I need to say something about the situation."

"Could everybody take just like four inches worth of a step forward? Could y'all just move forward just a little bit so I can open my folder?" or raising your hand and saying, "Hey, the back row can't breathe. I've got no elbow room. Can we fix this please?"

Often conductors can see this, but often they can't because they're worried about six other things at the same time. So it's not just the capacity to complain, right? It's the capacity to make a positive contribution to the group by knowing your worth, knowing you matter, and knowing also that other people are probably feeling what you're feeling.

If you have a question, somebody else probably has that question, too. And to raise your hand, step forward with a suggestion, make yourself known, make yourself seen in a way that is productive and kind and effective, it starts with believing that you belong, and believing that your

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feelings are valid and they're probably shared.

If you're particularly introverted or particularly conflict averse, this might be a really good situation to play out in your mind, to contemplate on your own at home or in some safe-for-you place, to sit comfortably in a chair and just sit with the idea that you belong and that your feelings are okay and imagining for yourself this uncomfortable situation where you're going to need to speak up, you know you're going to need to speak up.

So this could be about chorus. This could be about work. This could be about a relationship. Just play it out in your mind ahead of time and notice what your body feels. How do you feel, first, when you sit with the idea that you belong, how does your body feel when you allow emotion to move through it?

And to know that that emotion is fine. Happy, sad, comfortable, or not comfortable, it's all okay and you're okay.

And then imagining the uncomfortable situation, the uncomfortable conversation and how you might maintain that feeling of belonging and safety, even as you say or do something that right now feels like it's outside of your comfort zone.

We expand our capacity to lead first by imagining what it will be like – productively imagining what it will be like.

We don't expand our capacity to lead when we imagine that we're gonna get our head chopped off, that's not helpful.

Imagining what it will be like, playing it through, remembering our strength, remembering our value – what we value, and the value we bring to the world. And doing that as often as we need to.

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It doesn't have to take a very long time. You can certainly take a good 30 minutes and even write about belonging, listing all the ways I know I belong. “I belong because, I belong to this, I belong to that. This is the right fit for me because...” You can do all of that on paper, too.

And you can also notice standing, while you're standing in line at the grocery store. “I belong. There's space for me. I belong. There's space for me.”

That actually builds muscles. It builds mental and emotional muscles to say uncomfortable things, to have uncomfortable conversations and to have them from the best place you can, from your highest self.

So you're not contributing to the reactivity of the world, but you're honestly taking the next step for you, for everyone, to make the world better.

I said this was going to be a short little thing about capacity, because there is so much to say about capacity. There are so many examples. There are so many ways to expand our capacity.

But I offer this just as a bite-sized chunk, as a beginning, and I hope it's helpful. I want you to let me know.

Thank you so much for listening.

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