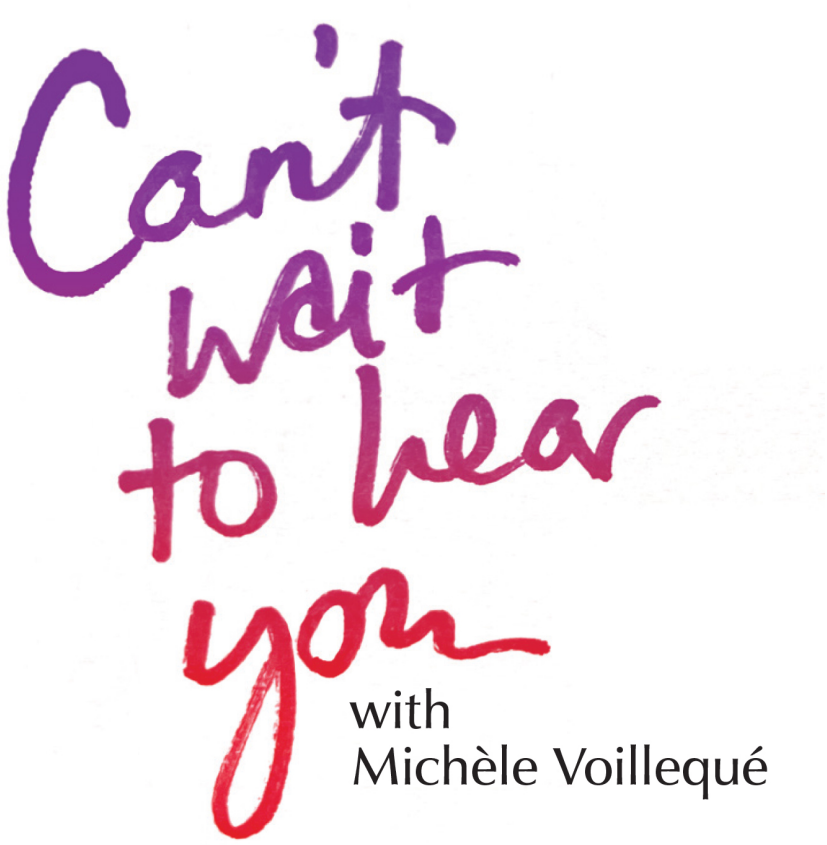
Ep #87: What Makes a Good Leader?



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're a new listener to the podcast, you might not know that I'm a baseball fan. And this last week was a great week for baseball.

So Pat Murphy, who managed the Milwaukee Brewers to their first World Series Championship, was asked in the lead-up to that championship, "What makes a good leader?" And here's what he said.

He said, "You gotta be yourself. That's number one. So whatever your true identity and personality is, I think that has to come out to the players. But you gotta show love. It's love and discipline in that order."

And I've been thinking a lot about how the project of changing the way you sound, whether you're singing or speaking, comes down to, in one respect, self-leadership.

We have the self who does it the way we've always done it, and then we have the self who wants to do it differently, who suspects that this could be easier, who thinks, "Yeah, this could feel better. This could sound better. This could be different."

And that's the part of us that reaches out for voice lessons or signs up for a group class or goes to a chorus rehearsal, auditions for something, wants it to get better.

And yet we still have this regular self, you could imagine like the stick-figure version of yourself, who is pretty sure that the way we've always done it is good enough. It's kept us safe. It's helped us make friends. We have a job. We're housed. People like us. You know, it's good. Why change it?

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And then we have the part of us that wants it to be better, wants it to be different, wants it to be bigger, and that's the part of us that's interested in exploring what I call our resonant body.

So we have a stick figure version of ourself, and then we have our resonant version of ourself, our resonant body, which is like a really big gingerbread cookie version of ourself.

So it's not a stick figure and then, like, within a quarter of an inch, the gingerbread version. It's like a stick figure that's maybe two inches tall and the gingerbread version that's maybe eight or nine inches tall around it.

I'll explain what I mean. I am not talking about your chakras or your aura or your energy body, although there may be some overlap here.

What I'm talking about is the physical fact that when we use our voice for singing or, for speaking in a larger way, so louder than just across the kitchen table, like for public speaking, when we use our voice that way, our body literally vibrates.

You can feel this by putting your hand on your chest and then saying something in your normal voice, and you will feel the bones under your hand vibrate.

You can put your hand on your neck, your fingers along your vertebra, along your spine, and when you speak, you can feel those bones vibrate, too.

You can make a whooping sound, woo, and feel how that sound travels up into your head. You can stand in front of a wall, not touching the wall, but just in front of a wall, and speak into the room or sing into the room in a full way, not in a whispered way, but in a full way, and you

will be able to hear your voice behind you.

You can hear it bounce from the wall into your ears because the sound is leaking out the back of your body. It's not just all coming out your mouth. It's leaking, it's vibrating through your body, and then it, bounces off the wall, and then it comes into your ears.

This is the reason for band shells in public parks, which is sort of like a little half-room that we build so that all the sound from the band or the orchestra doesn't leak out the back, but you know, is projected forward ever so and gently by the band shell toward the audience.

When we're using our voice significantly we have a resonant body. We are physically bigger than when we're just sitting there.

And it's exploring this resonant body – this is what's happening in a voice lesson. This is what's happening in a choir rehearsal. When you're working on your voice, you're practicing being this bigger person, this louder person, this gingerbread version of yourself.

And that can feel really fun and really freeing, and at the same time, it can freak out the stick figure version of you because you're not gonna sound “normal,” in air quotes.

You're not gonna sound like you always sound. You're not going to sound like they expect you to sound. In fact, if you're doing it right, you're going to make lots of sounds that you've never heard before.

And there's a trust that we need to build inside ourselves between this great explorer, embracer of the resonant body, and the stick figure who's not entirely sure that this is a good idea.

And so when Pat Murphy says what makes a good leader is “love and discipline in that order,” what I think that means for us as singers and public speakers is that we understand that changing the voice takes

work. Whether we're singing or speaking, learning how to do it differently and applying that knowledge consistently, that takes discipline.

That is true.

But the D in my ABCD-N framework isn't discipline.

Because when it comes to the voice, we first have to learn how to let ourselves be. We have to let ourselves explore that resonant body, that gingerbread version of ourselves. We respect the stick figure, and we have to let ourselves play around with, "what's that gingerbread like?"

And so this is what the N in my ABCD-N framework is about. Noticing ourselves, noticing what's happening and what wants to happen, noticing how the body feels and how we feel, noticing how something sounded, and not beating ourselves up about it.

Knowing that when we are being the gingerbread, that we have a different set of criteria, we have a different set of rules than when we're being the stick figure.

And *noticing with compassion* is one of my definitions for love – noticing ourselves be this bigger version and letting it be.

When Pat Murphy says, "You gotta be yourself. Whatever your true identity and personality is has to come out," that's what we find in the gingerbread space.

It's not that the stick figure version is a false self. It's just our civilized self. The stick figure version of us has worked its whole life to sound like they expect us to. To say the right thing, to speak the right words, to, speak maybe even in the correct accent to get our needs met, to be safe in the world, to be included in community. And that is a great thing. We

need the stick figure version of ourselves.

And all that we truly are, all that we could possibly be is included in the gingerbread version.

And when we can develop a partnership in our minds between our regular self and the gingerbread version, our resonant self, then we can really make progress with our singing and public speaking because we create safety.

Now, part of my job as a voice teacher is to create safety in the studio for my students to explore all that they could possibly sound like. That's a main part of my job, to create a safe space for that to happen.

But just as important as me creating a safe space in the studio is for me to help my students find the safety within themselves to be the gingerbread version, to be their resonant version, to feel safe with that, even without me.

Because if they only feel safe being the resonant version of themselves in my studio, the world is never gonna get to hear them.

So one of the skills that we develop is their own tolerance for that resonant self and the dissonance and the fear that crops up between the stick figure version and the resonant version. And there's plenty of that in everyone I've ever met.

We are all so good at judging ourselves, at beating ourselves up, at not giving ourselves room to explore. It really is a self-protective mechanism. It's a really human thing, and it's a major stage of growth, I think, as a person, to get to the place where you can observe yourself without judging yourself, particularly when it comes to making sound.

Because other people can hear you, like, they can judge you, too.

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It's one thing to sit with your own mind and just observe your thoughts and not judge your thoughts. That's a great practice. There's a lot of value in meditation. But one of the safe things about meditation is that nobody else can hear what's going on inside your head.

When we're singing or working on our speaking voice, other people could hear that, and they could have opinions about it. And our inner critic wants to protect us from that potential shame, potential ostracism, potential rejection by other people. And unfortunately, it does that by shutting us down.

So that's a big part of the work. Again, this is why I love this quote by Pat Murphy, because it really, what makes a good leader? What makes a good leader of oneself is that you allow yourself to be yourself. You show your true personality to yourself, and you remember that it's love and discipline in that order.

We cannot change what we're judging. That's really the kicker.

Before we can change a behavior, a vocal habit, we have to see it clearly. We have to understand why it's happening, and we need to relax around it.

There's no disciplining your way out of a bad habit. You have to love yourself for having it first, and then you can change it.

And you may say to me, "Michèle, I think you're wrong about that, and I'm gonna prove you wrong." And by all means, go ahead.

But I think if we look at other examples in the world, you will see where this is true. The majority of the time, restrictive diets don't work. You're trying to discipline yourself without loving yourself, without understanding why the habits are the way they are in the first place.

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And you can put down an arbitrary rule and try to hold yourself to it, but without the love, without the understanding, the behavior won't change.

You can notice this with children. You can lay down the law and demand that things be a particular way. But if you don't understand the child and why they think the way they want to do it is a good idea, you will never win them over to your version of what's best. “Because I said so,” is not a good enough reason for the long term.

It does work in the short term. I have used that myself. But in the long term, it doesn't work. Love before discipline.

Love means noticing with compassion. Love means seeing clearly. Love means understanding your own or someone else's humanity. And when we've got that laid down, then discipline is appropriate and will actually work.

One of my personal meditation practices/survival strategies over the last 20 years or so has been meditating on divine qualities – things like hope and peace and joy and love – and what they mean for me, not just intellectually, not just spiritually, but what they mean for me in my body.

When I am contemplating “hope” I'm feeling into what that means for the inside of my body, and invariably, I find that hope brings about a kind of openness.

So in my framework, ABCD-N, where A is for “anchoring and opening the pipe,” the quality of hope gives me a way into anchoring and opening that I might not be able to find on a day when I am particularly stuck, when my body is particularly stiff. Opening doesn't feel like a possibility.

But if I can contemplate hope, if I can conjure up hope, if I can find examples of hope in the world, or if I can read a poem that inspires hope in me, that feeling in my body, that feeling in my self, in my heart, in my

mind, however you want to think about it, that feeling translates into greater openness in my body, and that helps me access a place where I can sing more effectively.

Same thing for peace, and a deeper, gentler breath. When I can breathe in peace or contemplate peace or imagine something peaceful in the world and what that-- if I was peace, what that would feel like for me – I am in a better place to sing well, because my breath is probably pretty calm.

So sometimes I can use my breath to find peace, and sometimes I use peace to find my breath.

This is also true for joy. This is also true for love.

These four big words hope, peace, joy, love are the themes of Advent, which is upon us. And if you're interested in exploring this connection between big feelings and using your body effectively, I invite you to join me for *A Singer's Advent*. This is what we're gonna be doing.

There will be journal exercises, there will be live-on-Zoom classes, there will be vocal exercises, there will be singing together, there'll be plenty of time for questions and answers.

The whole goal is to make the end of our year a more joyful, grounded experience than we might otherwise have, and to give you tools to honor your whole self – acknowledge the stick-figure version of you, and also embrace the gingerbread, big resonant body version of you.

So I hope this short conversation about self-leadership was helpful or interesting, and if you'd like to continue it, send me an email.

If you're not already on my email list, reach out and I'll make sure you get, registration information for *A Singer's Advent*. Or if you'd just like

to have a conversation, we can do that too.

Thank you so much for listening.

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