

Finding and Using Your Voice

As I started to reflect on this New Year, I realized how many powerful people I know (myself included) who struggle with using their voice. And to be clear, I'm not just referring to one's ability to talk or speak confidently. I'm talking more about consistently having the courage to be clear about who you are and what you want, and speaking that truth inoffensively with no attachment to the outcome.

I call it finding your voice.

There are so many important reasons to find your voice and use it. In minor scenarios it may bring you exactly what you want to eat at a restaurant. In major scenarios, it may catapult your life from ordinary or depressing, to a vibrancy that you thought didn't exist. Finding and using your voice now can change your life. For me using your voice does not mean spewing hurtful or angry words, and it doesn't mean projecting ideas onto others about how they should be behaving or acting. You can do that; but at the end of the day you'll likely find yourself living a miserable and unfulfilled existence.

Finding and using your voice looks different for all of us. Some of us need to use our voice in every aspect of our lives. Others of us struggle in our professional lives, in romantic relationships, or with raising our children. So I can't say exactly what it may mean for you. However, in my own search to use my voice well, I've learned directly and observed through others that there are five common elements.

It seems to me that people who use their voice well are:

- 1. Willing to accept responsibility for their own thoughts and actions and less likely to blame others for their circumstances.** This is hard – I know because sometimes we are victims of people's negative actions and they should be held responsible. Still, at the end of the day, your power lies within your own thoughts and actions. And typically when you move with that knowledge, your response to poor or devastating behavior is so much stronger than if you existed in a space of eternal blame.
- 2. Willing to be courageous.** You have to be brave, there's no getting around it. And if you are not naturally brave or courageous, you have to cultivate it. Learn how to be brave.
- 3. Willing to face their deepest fears.** It's one of the reasons you need courage, because you have to bring your fears to the forefront. Whether you share them with anyone or not, you must know what they are and why they exist.
- 4. Willing to ask yourself tough questions, answer them, and take the necessary steps towards change.** I think this element is pretty self-explanatory. It isn't enough to do any one of these three things alone. And typically those steps will translate into using your voice, in some form or fashion.
- 5. Willing to release the outcome.** I find this to be very difficult as well. But when you find your voice, it is often very much about expressing yourself well in the moment. And when the moment is over, you hope for the best or prepare for the worst and everything in between with confidence, or at minimum an intention of acceptance.

Incorporating the above five elements into your life is not easy. In all honesty, as I work daily to try and bring my best self to every situation, incorporating the above isn't even close to enjoyable. But, the alternative is worse.

When I decided to start Voices Under Forty, I became very worried (and sometimes still worry) about my own struggles to use my voice. I wondered deep down if it was okay to admit that. As the founder and president of an organization dedicated to inspiring others to use their voice and speak, could I admit my own failures, past, present, and I'm sure future, at using my voice in a powerful way? I soon decided that

yes, I could admit it, to myself and to others. Miraculously, after this admission, moving forward with tasks and ideas felt more comfortable. Now it was much easier for me to keep my fears in perspective.

I hope that in 2009 you have an opportunity to do the work you need to do to find and use your voice in a powerful and positive way. We'll be trying here at Voices Under Forty, and look forward to sharing the journey with you.