

Remarks from VoicesUnder40 Launch Event

Good afternoon – thank you all so much for being here today. By now most of you know that Voices Under 40 is a nonprofit public speaking resource organization for younger adults and youth. Our mission is to educate, train, and develop powerful communicators, and arrange inspirational opportunities and events that highlight young voices.

Now I've worked in the nonprofit sector long enough to know that there are tons of amazing organizations that are working with youth, celebrating them, connecting them, training them, developing them, mentoring them. So I didn't start Voices Under 40 to try and reinvent the wheel of youth development.

A few years ago however, I noticed that in spite of all the wonderful work being done for, on behalf of, and by young people, there is still this image, particularly amongst older generations, that all young people are unfocused, unmotivated, that their only major talent is to teach technology to older generations, and that there are no great young leaders rising out of the masses of younger generations.

As I started to see this idea play out, I was also introduced to the power of public speaking. In the traditional sense I'd witness a prominent speaker move a crowd from the podium. But then I'd also have opportunities to watch a shy student deliver a speech and watch her confidence level skyrocket almost overnight. I worked behind the scenes and saw an industry ripe with talent and opportunity that didn't just start/stop or exist solely at the podium. I also saw how public speaking could be a vehicle to address any issue – from the environment to women's issues, politics, and entertainment, public speaking skills could apply across the board.

And in my own life, I started to find the power in my voice. I would never describe myself as shy, but the truth is that for many years, I did not trust the power in my own voice, my own thoughts and ideas. As I started to become a stronger communicator professionally, I noticed a change personally and vice versa. I'd handle a call efficiently with CNN, and somehow it became easier to talk to my parents. Or my friendships would strengthen and I could talk more clearly with Verizon customer support and work it out. I worked well with customer support and it became easier to communicate with men more effectively in romantic relationships. Okay...I can't help but smile because I'm still working on that one but you get the idea! The point is I started to think that there was something to this whole idea of finding your voice and using it well.

As the ideas started to take shape, I noted that many of the men and women who have produced great works of art and literature, led revolutionary political movements, or just overall made history with their life's work, did so while under the age of 40. And it struck me as to how critical it is to shatter this myth that young people today are not capable of leadership and greatness right now – just because they are young. But the second part of that, the deeper and I think more

challenging piece is this need to connect the generations so that people of all ages can be invested in supporting, celebrating and connecting young people and shattering that myth.

It does not do us any good as a society to have a Baby Boomer generation that thinks young people don't get it, or Millennials who think that 30-Something's don't get it; or to even have younger generations who couldn't tell you what a baby boomer is or have no idea the inherent sacrifices that leaders in their 60's, 70's, 80's, and 90's (hello - Dr. Dorothy Height) have made on our behalf. The truth is we all have a valuable place and to me it is time to marry the passion of youth and the wisdom of experience, and just make lives better for people of every age.

I chose public speaking and started Voices Under 40 so that we could first serve as a resource for young adults and youth who wanted to know more about public speaking in the traditional sense in terms of the industry, but then for others who just want to grow more comfortable and confident in their communication in their every day lives. So our programming will fall under programs like *Speaker 101* – the basics of public speaking. We will have *Speaker Support Training* for those interested in the behind the scenes aspect of the industry. We will have *Public Speaking In Everyday Life* so that we can all learn how to use the tricks of the trade to communicate better in our professional and personal lives. Second, Voices Under 40 will seek to emphasize the evidence of the positive impact that young people make in our communities every day. *City Spotlight* will start out as an online initiative and highlight spectacular young folks doing big things in their communities. Eventually we will grow that into a full scale program where we will travel and set up celebratory events that highlight these folks so that it is clear young people are active, committed, and changing people's lives. Finally, we will work hard through our Voices at a Glance events, networking events, and general programming to help address and connect the generations. Our vision is that countless generations will be inspired and educated on how public speaking skills can change individual lives and strengthen communities and that Voices Under 40 will be a resource for people of all ages to support, celebrate, and connect young people.

Now is the time, and I am so excited about this, to start to connect and build relationships. There's a quote on my website – quote of the month, and at the end of it it says "...it is a generation's direction that best reveals its collective self-image and sense of destiny."

I am hopeful, and optimistic, and inspired and encouraged about the direction of the generations that are walking this earth right now and all of the amazing voices under 40 that we will all help to support, celebrate, and connect.

Thank you.