

The Unknown Messenger: Our Voice



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Article published in the newspaper Lanza & the webpage of the company Vertisub, August 2008, link: www.vertisub.net - 18.08.2008

An entire human life is
contained in the voice”,

Meredith Monk,
American singer and
composer

The other day I was waiting in line at the supermarket as I saw – and heard – a situation between a little boy and his mother:

“Mum, can I have an ice cream?”

“No, dear, not before dinner”

“But mum, I really want an ice cream!”

“No, we are having dinner when we get home.”

“Please, mum, just this once...”

“I SAID NO – YOU CAN'T HAVE AN ICE CREAM!”

“Are you angry, mum?”

“NO, I AM NOT ANGRY!”

Just like the little boy, everybody who was standing in line had gotten the real message that the mother was transmitting – she was indeed angry.

And I thought to myself, what an excellent example of the fact that in situations where there is a conflict between the spoken word and the tone of the voice, the tone of the voice always wins over the spoken words.

Some statistics and why..

According to investigations made by the American psychologist Albert Mehrabian, what we interpret when we communicate with each other consists of 93% non-verbal signals while the words we speak make up for a mere 7%. And of these non-verbal 93%, the way we use our voice makes up for 38% of what we are transmitting.

The voice is our primary way of communicating. Just look at the interaction between an infant and an adult, or the way we talk to animals. Intuitively we adjust our voice to transmit the emotion of the message. What is often unacknowledged, is that this basic and underlying communication by the tone of voice continues throughout our adult life; in our daily interactions it carries the potential to soothe, to persuade, to patronize, to threaten, to create intimacy or distance, to attract or to repel...

Our voice serves as a bridge between what we wish to say and the listeners and it is intimate in a unique way. Coming forth from our inside - our body, it enters into the body of the listeners. And therefore it has the power to produce different states of mind.

What can we improve?

Not only the tone of voice carries messages. When we use our voice we are depending on various elements that affect our listeners, and often some of them are inhibiting us from getting through.

There might be tensions in the area of the throat and the neck, making the voice come out tight and squeaky. A bad or no connection between the body and the voice gives the effect of lacking vocal power, and too much air mixed into the voice projection equally prevents us from having authority when we speak. Many people breathe only in the upper part of the torso, giving the voice an unpleasant sound and a stressful and unpleasant effect for both speaker and listener, while bad articulation makes it difficult for the listeners to interpret the words.

I can't sing!

The inhibitions mentioned above are usually unconscious. What is often conscious is our relationship with the voice when it comes to singing. How many times have I heard “I don't have a voice” or “I can't sing” as a trainer?

The first thing I adjust as when I start a training session, are these words. We all have our own voice – but some of us don't have access to it. This distinction is important, suddenly the perspective changes, from creating a voice that doesn't exist – to gaining access to the voice that is waiting inside. What has been missing is not the voice as such, but a favorable situation where the voice can be approached and liberated.

When we talk about ‘being able to sing’ we refer to a very small slice of what our voice really is. Each culture has its own parameters of how a beautiful voice should sound, limited by a range of melodies sung in a certain way. And if we haven't been successful in reproducing exactly this kind of melodies with the appropriate vocal quality, we grow up thinking that we cannot sing.

We all have a voice – our own

It may sound strange, but my experience with voice classes for over a decade has left me without any doubts. I still haven't met a person who cannot sing, only people who have lacked the situations to discover their voice and the joy that comes with liberating it.

Training the voice helps us access its optimal potential so that we can communicate efficiently, ensuring that it supports the message we wish to transmit. And there is more to it: A large majority of us are only acquainted with a limited aspect of our voice. Working with the voice means discovering hidden resources. It's a gratifying process as it increases our self-esteem and confidence.

With permission from one of my participants, I let her testimonial sum it up:

"Our voice is the reflection of our most authentic self"

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