



Finding Your Leadership Voice: Your Personal Purpose and Vision

By Libby Wagner, Founder of Professional Leadership Results

At the risk of sounding cliché, leaders come in all shapes, sizes and colors. They have varying styles, personalities and results. And honestly, this really cannot be encapsulated into some sort of categorization or profile: your Myers-Briggs or DiSC or “colors” assessments might offer an intriguing horoscope-like, lively discussion, but it’s not truly you.

I can’t remember now whether I’m a blue with brown undertones or a red with orange spots. I don’t think I’m green. Am I? Frankly, I’ve met some leaders whose colors are more akin to a Jackson Pollack painting and perhaps we shouldn’t even *go there*.

What I believe differentiates you as a leader is your *voice*.

Many know I am a poet. I haven’t talked about it that much because when I first began my business, I thought business leaders might think it was scary or silly. It was this absurd secret I kept buried like some affliction or ailment I didn’t want to

admit. Ridiculous, I know, because actually, being a poet lets me look at the world differently—I don’t always see things the way others do, and it’s not because I’ve got some romantic notions about it. Poets look for detail. Poets just swoon over specificity (now you’re beginning to recognize the symptoms, aren’t you?). Poets make connections and comparisons, analogies and metaphors. Poets also look for meaning and discovery. It’s good to be a poet. It’s fun to be a poet with business leaders, and if you don’t know me, rest assured, I’ve not made one client write a poem yet!

When I went to writing school, we learned about voice. When I taught writing for many years, I helped students find their voices. What does this mean? You have something to say that’s important. How or why people may believe you, be moved by you, and especially moved to act, is important. What does your voice sound like? And I don’t mean its auditory characteristics. How do you know if you’ve found your authentic voice and whether it will influence anyone or impact business results?

Voice is how you sound in your speech, your writing, your messaging and framing. Voice—in Core Dimensions terms—is the manifestation of Genuineness. Those behaviors and actions

and idiosyncrasies that make you *you* and allow you to lead from a place of confidence, assurance and passion. Voice is weaving your stories and experience and view of the world into how you lead and how others perceive you. Your voice is uniquely, absolutely yours.

Most business writing I read is awful—boring, verbose and absolutely ignores the audience in any way other than to demonstrate how smart the author thinks he is. There are exceptions, of course, and these are those whose voice, personality and humanity jump out at you when you read. You feel like you know the person, have a sense of their style, personality and principles. They feel authentic and genuine to you. If what they say resonates with you, you might even imagine yourself aligning or following, adapting or adopting ideas, methodologies or traits. I think this is one reason why new web marketing technologists encourage people to utilize videos to market themselves—at least we can hear people to see what they might be like because often their voices “on the page” are difficult to discern.

How can you find your voice? Does this sound a bit esoteric to you? Has there been a small voice in your own head saying ‘what the HECK is she talking about?’ Hear me out.

Steps to finding or redefining your voice:

Step 1. Get a journal, thought book or someplace to write and record your thinking.

Yes, I realize that paper is so *old school* and we’re on the verge of “kindleing” becoming a verb, but I think it makes a difference. I can type really fast and I can write on a computer;

too, but I know I write differently long-hand. It’s kinetic in a different way. Just do it.

Step 2. Use the following questions to prompt your writing and thinking.

Best method is to just write, without stopping, editing or censoring. If you struggle with writing or this whole idea sounds torturous, make it as easy as you can on yourself. I use a digital kitchen timer sometimes to help me stay focused for a period of time. If you get stuck, just write “I can’t think of anything . . .” or “blah blah blah” until you get unstuck.

- **WHAT DO YOU WANT?** How do you envision your best version of yourself as a leader? Where would you work? With whom? In what industry or circumstances? Or perhaps less general, what do you want in a particular situation or scenario?
- **WHY DO YOU DO WHAT YOU DO?** What is your personal mission or purpose? What gets you excited and completely enthusiastic? Where is your passion?
- **WHAT EXPERIENCES OR INCIDENTS HAVE SHAPED YOU?** What are some of the best lessons you’ve learned? How do you know? What would you do again, no matter what?
- **HOW DO YOU MAKE THINGS BETTER?** I’ve included, at the bottom, one of my favorite Emerson quotes about defining success. How about you? What is your ultimate value and contribution?
- **WHAT NEXT?** Where do you go from here? What’s your next step, decisive action or grand adventure?

Set your timer (or watch the clock) and write for at least 10 minutes on each topic without stopping. Don’t be surprised if

you want to write more—indeed, these are things that are important to you and you may have a lot to say!

Step 3: Put your writing/thinking work away for at least a day.

Give yourself some distance from the idea generating and brainstorming. Then, set aside an hour or 90 minutes to review and reflect on what you've written. Ask yourself the following:

"After my review, I have identified the following three intentions for my own development as a leader: 1, 2, 3."

The writing/thinking exercise helps you get clear about what's important to you and for you. Reflecting and reviewing allows you to identify the next, most pertinent intentions to have for yourself. This is the road to congruence.

I still help people find their voices: I help my clients identify what they want, why they want it, how to say it or ask for it, how to clearly articulate, how to listen and respond, how to make good decisions—all of these things help someone stand firmly, decidedly, in their own important places, speaking with confidence. Where do you want to take your company or team? What does success look like for you? What do you want them to do, or stop doing? Your ability to articulate, to use language that rings true to you and that influences others, is using your voice well.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, on success:

"To laugh much; to win respect of intelligent persons and the affections of children; to earn the approbation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give one's self; to leave the world a little better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm, and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded."

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