

When I lost my voice...

by Tahra Millan

I have a confession to make. Somewhere between high school and several years out of graduate school, I lost my voice. No, I wasn't physically unable to use my voice.

Instead in my professional life, I was hindered by doubt, insecurity, and low self-esteem that I simply could not say the things that were going through my mind. I listened intently and had a lot of thoughts to share, but my belief that my input was not important caused me to hesitate.

While other colleagues took the spotlight sometimes even offering the same points that were trapped inside my head, I stayed silent. I watched as my peers and colleagues confidently offer interesting insights at meetings and got promoted while I left work feeling defeated and frustrated. This loop of silence was not easy to combat. The solution was not simply just to "speak up." How can you speak up when your inner negative belief is stifling your brilliance?

Here's how I found my voice:

Being in charge of something.

It wasn't until I started to manage others that my voice returned. It was the art of being in service to other professionals where I was able to slowly release the grip of anxiety and negative self-talk. So, here's why being a supervisor is a critical confidence booster. Ironically, one way to get outside of your head is to be required to be inside other people's heads. As a manager of people, a good leader is not someone who leads people.

A good leader is someone in service to their team. To serve is to know someone's needs. To know someone's needs requires a willingness to step into another's shoes. When I began to manage others, I found it easier to champion their ideas vs. my own. I discovered my own voice by advocating for others.

Getting outside of your head.

Move your body as much as your mind to improve cognitive function and reduce overthinking. Physical activity stimulates the release of endorphins, neurotransmitters that act as natural painkillers and mood elevators, which can help alleviate feelings of stress and anxiety associated with overthinking. Studies have shown that even short bouts of exercise, such as a brisk walk, can enhance cognitive performance by increasing blood flow to the brain and promoting the growth of new neurons in regions responsible for memory and decision-making. So between meetings, make it a point to move your body. It will reduce anxiety while it also activates your voice.

Stand for something.

One of the exercises we do as executive communications coaches is called The 5 Words. It's a distillation exercise to help you gain insight into your values and establish a personal brand. When you can stand for something that expands your sense of self, you build courage around these ideals. When you walk into a meeting with a clear sense of who you are and what you want to project into the world, your words follow.



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