

When Your Voice Creates a Roadblock to your Career; Find Another Path

by Dorothy Tannahill-Moran



Professionally, Dorothy Tannahill-Moran is known as the “Introvert Whisperer,” helping people to find career success by providing unique, actionable career advice. Dorothy also has had spasmodic dysphonia for about 20 years, first noticing it when she was making a presentation to her CEO. “I wasn’t nervous but my voice had a definite “warble” to it. It took another seven years for it to get to the point where I knew something was wrong. I guess I’m lucky and grateful that it never occurred to me to do anything differently because of my SD. I have viewed it as just another challenge life has thrown my way but I do acknowledge that for many people with SD, it is a life-altering journey.” Dorothy is sharing her professional advice but with a twist of her personal understanding of having spasmodic dysphonia.

By the time I was diagnosed with spasmodic dysphonia, I was already used to finding “a path less taken” to achieve my goals. As an introvert, I often found that much of the advice on how to effectively manage my career did not work for me. I didn’t know it at the time, but we live in an extrovert-oriented culture and our ideals are based on that personality-driven behavior. I’d rather eat a bug than go work a room as a means of meeting new people. So, when someone told me advice like “go work the room” as a means of meeting people, I knew I had to find a way that worked for me. Common advice doesn’t mean it works for everyone.

I tell you this because I’ve noticed many people with SD get their career derailed because of their voice. Sometimes the derailment was done to you; and for many you made a reluctant decision to stop doing what you were doing. Letting your career get derailed for any reason is dispiriting at the least and depressing for most. I urge you to find another path to career fulfillment. There is ALWAYS more than one path to every goal including your career.

Since I recognize what you may be going through, I’m not going to give you just a pep talk. You need some practical guidance on both how to deal with both the dent in your self-esteem and how to put your career on another meaningful path.

Mending the Self-Esteem

Your Self-Talk

The message we give ourselves is the most powerful of all. If your self-talk disparages you in anyway, you have set yourself up for a self-fulfilling situation. A negative mindset cannot lead to a positive life. It is possible for you to stop or minimally reduce the negative chatter going on in your head. Like working out a muscle, you do have to continue to do this long enough for it to take effect but you can do it.

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Here's how:

- 1- Notice when you say to yourself or even out loud a negative thought about you. No, you won't catch all of them all of the time but the more you catch, the more you *will* catch over time until there's almost nothing to catch. You could also ask those closest to you to point this out simply to assist with your awareness.
- 2- Replace what you said with a positive statement. The point of this isn't to stop your self-talk but to train your self-talk to be positive. What you say has got to be something you know and believe. In other words, if you say an affirmation that you don't believe, it won't help. You also need to be careful to not use a negative in your statement. Example of a correct replacement: "I'm worthy of success." Example of incorrect using a negative: "I'm not stupid."

Thought for you to consider: Whatever you believe about yourself on the inside is what you will manifest on the outside.

"Prime" Yourself

In her book, *Presence*, Amy Cuddy tells you about restoring your personal power. She and others have studied various aspects to being self-confident. Basically, they found in a series of studies that when a person is "primed" negatively or positively before tackling a problem, it impacts the outcome in the same direction.

To Prime yourself, you think of a situation where you were your most powerful. It would be a time that you were being consistent with your personal values, skills and character and produced an outcome that was positive and meaningful. You could write this down to reinforce the thinking and how that situation felt. That's it. Apparently, we are easily shifted by our own thoughts. I'd suggest priming yourself daily if your self-confidence is still suffering.

Help someone

You'd be shocked at how good you can feel when you get out of your own head and shift into service to others. This can be anything so get creative or use some of those skills you've amassed at work. Helping someone else will really boost your spirit.

Making a New Path

Tweak your Career

A good alternative to the career you had is to tweak some of the conditions of your work. My own sister was a bank auditor for years and eventually became a consultant that did bank auditing when most of the corporate auditor positions moved out of her city. I once had an attorney as a client who didn't want to keep working as an attorney. I was able to Google "careers that use law degrees" and found a list of 100 careers other than being an attorney but needed the background and education. Capitalize on your background and skills.

Brand a New Identity

Katherine Hepburn never shied away from acting when her voice started shaking. In fact, it became her trademark and personal brand. You'll notice there are many people out there with disabilities who will make the disability the centerpiece of their work. Rather than shrinking with your SD, live it large!

Resurrect Your Dream

One way to look at the momentary blip in your career path is that it's a signal for you to pursue your dream or to create a new dream. I can just hear a few of you more "mature" readers already dismissing this idea because of your age. It's never too late and you're never too mature to have a big audacious goal. Keep in mind that Colonel Sanders didn't launch his chicken empire until he was 70.

Retool

It may be time for you to retool your education and skills. Use this as an opportunity to do something fun and exciting. Go back to school or pursue a program to test your interest.

Reset your Perspective

Don't settle for "just" any job that allows you to shrink from exposure to speaking. Have fun exploring a new path. Be bold. Be willing to risk. Decide how you want to be going forward and go be that!

Most people with SD talk about the negative impact it has had to their career and life. It's not fun – I know from experience. I also know you can turn the situation around and make it the best time of your life.



National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association

300 Park Boulevard | Suite 335 | Itasca, IL 60143 | 800-795-6732 | NSDA@dysphonia.org
www.dysphonia.org
