



How To NEVER Lose Your Voice

The 3 Essential Elements To Being Able To Use Your Voice For As Long and As Loud As You Want Without Suffering Any Consequences

Part 1

LOSING YOUR VOICE ISN'T INEVITABLE, AND I'M GOING TO TELL YOU HOW TO NEVER LOSE IT AGAIN...

At least twice a week, someone in my circle asks for magic solutions for battling vocal fatigue - you know, when your throat feels raw, when you feel like your voice dropped an octave, when there are spotty parts of your range where nothing happens, when your high notes just aren't there...

Here's the thing: THERE ARE NO MAGIC SOLUTIONS.

What DOES exist, though, is technique that prevents this from EVER happening in the first place.

There are 3 primary things that need to happen correctly in order to sing for hours and hours without feeling fatigue:

- Support of the sound
- Placement of the sound
- Shaping of the sound

In Part 1, I'm going to talk about support of the sound - one of the most commonly misunderstood and misused pieces which, when done correctly, is absolutely game-changing.

Just ask my World Champion client, Mikko Blaze Bordeaux, who learned this piece in one session and went from feeling raw after a few songs to being

able to sing anything he wanted, as long and as loud as he wanted, without feeling any pain or strain.

Before we dig in to this, I want to say that EVEN IF YOU THINK YOU KNOW THIS ALREADY, please hear me out. In the 19+ years I've been coaching singers, so far 100% have come to me unaware of how to do this.

WHICH BREAKS MY HEART.

In my experience:

If you don't understand it well enough to explain to me how to do it, then you probably aren't clear how to do it.

If you're not clear how to do it, it's unlikely that you are doing it in your singing,

Which means you are probably experiencing some level of vocal fatigue.

LET'S DO THIS.

If I were to punch you in the belly, what kind of sound would you make?

Something like this: "huhhh"?

Awesome. I promise not to do that to you.

If I were to tell you we're going to be doing a photoshoot in your bikini or Speedo, how would your posture change for those shoots?

Whether you actually have belly flab or not, it's socialized nature for us to stand a little taller and suck in our bellies when they're exposed for all the world to see, right?

Awesome. Again, I promise not to do that to you.

Now, I want you to put those two things together: I want you to tuck your belly like you do on a first date or in a bikini photo shoot, and at the same time, make a "huh" sound like you are being punched.

FANTASTIC.

That's it. That's what it looks like to support your sound.

Let me explain why you should do this and what it will do for your singing:

In singing, we relax our bellies like we do after eating a big meal prior to taking in a breath. This allows the breath to come in low - like, around your navel instead of up in your chest.

Once that low breath is taken, when it's time to make sound of any kind, we immediately tuck that belly in with a quick & firm motion while making sound, and hold it there till our next breath, which allows our abdominal muscles to aid in engaging the diaphragm to support the sound.

Why is that necessary? Here are my favorite reasons which I call, "The 4 Ps"

1 - When you use those big, strong belly muscles to take the initial impact of making sound, it PROTECTS your tiny (but mighty) vocal cords from that blast of power, allowing the air to pass over them easily instead of slamming them together. Repeated slamming can cause those cords to swell, get inflamed, develop calluses (GROSS!), all of which make it so they can't meet properly. When they can't meet all the way, that's when you experience gaps in your range - places where the notes just aren't there. So the #1 P stands for PROTECT.

2 - This will sound totally opposite from what you might expect, but when you engage this way at the onset of making sound, it actually PROLONGS your breath, allowing you to get through that entire phrase instead of petering out at the end or taking extra breaths in inconvenient spots. Cuz, you know, you have to plan breaths when you sing - when you speak, you automatically take enough air to complete your thought, but when you sing, everything is extended so it takes more air and more planning. So the #2 P stands for PROLONG.

3 - You know how when you're little and you go down the stairs on your butt while making a sound and each time you hit the next step, your voice gets this jolt of POWER? Well, you get that same kind of effect from engaging

your diaphragm with the aid of your abdominals - a little boost of POWER just from supporting your sound. This means you get to have a bigger sound without straining from your throat. COOL. So the #3 P stands for POWER.

4 - Randy Jackson coined the term "pitchy" as a judge on American Idol and it's become sort of the universal way of saying you are not singing in tune. Whether you tend to go sharp (higher than the correct pitch) or you tend to go flat (lower than the correct pitch), when you engage your diaphragm with the help of your abdominal muscles.

Part 2

Now, I'm going to talk about #2 of the 3 essential pieces which is PLACEMENT OF SOUND.

Let's get this bit out of the way: if you are using your chest voice, your head voice, striving for an "open throat", or stressing about your vocal breaks as a contemporary singer, YOU'RE ON A FAST TRACK TO VOCAL HEALTH ISSUES.

Unless you are an opera singer, a classical soloist, or choral singer, those things are IRRELEVANT to your singing.

Yes, you read that correctly. I'll explain.

I want you to yawn. Like, the big, stretchy kind that totally opens up your mouth and your throat so much that you sound like Darth Vader when you inhale and exhale on that yawn.

THIS is that "open throat" space you hear singers and coaches referring to all the time. If you create this kind of space in your mouth, you will be able to access your chest voice, your head voice, AND all those pesky breaks which are sort of like switching gears on a bicycle or car.

It's also the technique used by opera singers and classical singers.

So what? What's the big deal? Why is this irrelevant??

Well, your chest voice isn't designed to go very high, compared to how high you regularly have to sing. If you push that chest voice higher than it's meant to go - which loads of singers do - you're going to suffer the consequences:

- It'll hurt, eventually.
- It'll wear you out.
- It'll potentially cause you to lose your voice.
- Or get calluses on your cords.

And if your only other option is to switch into your head voice (which singers sometimes call their falsetto)... I mean... you CAN... but it's NEVER going to sound how you want it to sound.

Remember that Darth Vader breath? Now picture it combined with your 80-yr-old Nanna's speaking voice. Or, "the fat lady" who sings when it's all over.

SO WHAT DO YOU DO INSTEAD?

I'm so glad you asked.

That big, stretchy, Darth Vader yawn you created blocks off the passageway into your nose.

But the passageway into your nose allows you to sing really high, with incredible power, and without breaks in your voice - WITHOUT DOING ANY DAMAGE.

So we don't want to block that off. EVER. Unless you sing opera.

It also allows you to sing lightly and easily, taking a pass on the incredible power - WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE NANNA.

Plus, you're already used to the kind of PLACEMENT I'm describing that doesn't block off the passageway into your nose:

It's your speaking voice.

Here's a little trick to help you know whether you are placing your sound where you want:

Make that big, Darth Vader yawn again and sustain a fairly high pitch on an "aww" vowel (like a yawn).

While making that sound, plug your nose.

Now plug and unplug back and forth while making that sound.

If it sounds exactly the same with your nose plugged as it does with your nose NOT plugged, you are placing the sound in your opera voice, blocking off the passageway into your nose.

NOT what we want.

Now relax that stretch inside your mouth and say, "hello my name is (your name)".

Plug your nose and say it again.

Do you feel the vibrations under your fingers that are plugging your nose?

Do you hear that it sounds like your nose is plugged?

That means you are PLACING YOUR SOUND exactly where you want it.

When you sing with THIS voice, you can go extremely high without ever hitting a break or feeling any pain.

There are two contemporary vocal techniques which use this PLACEMENT: belt & mix.

PS - "Belt" and "belting it out" are almost always NOT THE SAME THING:

Belt is a contemporary vocal technique, and

Belting it out is a phrase used to describe doing something very loudly.

Another tip: if you are trying out this PLACEMENT and it still hurts, it means you're not doing it correctly. It will NEVER hurt when it is right. And it will NEVER cause you vocal damage or voice loss or fatigue.

If you have a history of singing in a chest voice with a really open throated space, it's going to feel challenging to make this adjustment and I recommend working with a coach who understands exactly how to do this.

If you'd like to try out a little belting, type "I want to belt" and I'll hook you up with a vocal exercise to try it.

Part 3

It's time to talk about the third and final piece of this equation: SHAPING THE SOUND.

Ever lowered the key of your song because that top note is just too challenging? Or even picked a new song because of it?

I don't know why I'm asking - I KNOW you've done this because it's one of the most common things I hear from singers in a first session.

It's also one of my favorite things: to help singers NAIL those seemingly impossible high notes, oftentimes within that first session.

I hear people ALL THE TIME talking about how you need to work for weeks, months, even YEARS to "expand the range" to be able to sing higher and lower notes.

I CALL BULLSHIT.

Every person is born with an astonishing range that doesn't need to be expanded. What DOES need to happen to reach every note within that range is learning how to SHAPE THE SOUND inside the mouth.

When you learn how to SHAPE THE SOUND you are making, you not only are able to access notes you didn't know how to reach before, but you are also

able to keep your voice healthy and strong from no longer feeling ANY need to strain.

High notes (and super low notes) require space in your mouth in order to come out without any straining. The rule of thumb with space is:

For classical/legit singing (the Darth Vader placement): with a huge yawn in the back of the throat, drop your jaw as much as possible and once it's dropped all the way, widen to make more space.

For contemporary singing: it's the exact opposite. No yawning please, and widen as much as possible, then drop to create more space WITHOUT lifting in the back. I call this "mouth space" - it's the space forward of your molars because we don't make space behind them or we are in classical mode.

BUT THAT'S ONLY THE BEGINNING.

Ever have a pitch that you normally are able to sing just fine but in that one song it's really challenging?

Vowels can throw a wrench into your singing. Even some consonants have the power to limit your abilities. Here's why:

YOUR VOWELS (AND SOME CONSONANTS) DETERMINE THE AMOUNT OF SPACE IN YOUR MOUTH

Take the "ee" vowel sound, as in "me", for example: when you make an "ee" in your mouth, your jaw isn't dropped very far, and the middle of your tongue comes up to the roof of your mouth, which **TOTALLY GETS IN THE WAY** of having any kind of mouth space.

Or the "ooh" vowel sound, as in "you": when you shape your mouth to make an "ooh" vowel, your lips are rounded around your mostly closed mouth. Not a lot of space for that high pitch, is it?

Any vowel that requires you to have less than ideal space in your mouth is going to make singing the pitch **EXTRA HARD**.

As you can imagine, the trouble consonants are also the ones that limit the amount of space: consonants like B, P, W, V, and M.

SO HOW DO YOU FIX THIS?

Vowel modification. With any vowel that closes your mouth shape, drop your jaw and widen your mouth as needed to create more space inside your mouth. When you create more space, "ee" becomes more like "ay" or "eh". "Ooh" becomes more like "uhh" with a teeny bit of a "w" at the very end.

Here's an important thing to remember about vowel modification: your audience will hear the word you intend them to hear, but YOU WILL NEVER FOOL YOURSELF. Because it's an intentional decision, you will always know you are pronouncing it differently, but your audience won't be listening for it and will likely not even notice.

Perfect example: ever notice how in Celine Dion's song "Power of Love" she sings, "cuz I'm your lay-DEH and you are my man"? Probably never even thought about the fact that she's singing "lay-deh" instead of "la-dee". Your ear/brain heard what she wanted you to hear, but she modified the shape of the vowel so she could sing the pitch without straining.
Cool, eh?

Easy vowels are the ones that allow your mouth to be as dropped or as wide as you want without changing the way it's supposed to be pronounced. Make all your hard vowels more like the easy ones, and it'll make all the difference in the world.

SO TO RECAP:

SUPPORTING the sound allows you to have more air, have incredible power, sing in tune, and most importantly to protect your voice.

Contemporary PLACEMENT of the sound allows you to make powerful sounds at least an octave higher than classical placement allows, without having to push and strain past your natural break.

SHAPING the sound allows you the space needed to access your full range, including notes you didn't think you had, eliminating strain on challenging pitches.

If you'd like to go deeper on this, reach out to Katti Powell at info@singwithoutlimits.com

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