



CLARA VOCE—THE GREETING OF HEART AND SPIRIT

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We began our lesson by visioning her voice, where the voice was going, where she wanted to place it, where she intended the sound to flow, what she desired to express through the music, and what she wanted to feel after having sung the piece. We warmed up with vocal exercises and then I stopped and asked her, “Why sing? Why take time out of your hectic day at the bank to come here and sing?”

“Because the gift of music should be used,” she answered. “It gives me joy.”

Clara voce—clear voice—the greeting of heart and spirit.

The encounter with my student gave me pause. Because of my job with the Greenleaf Center and my life’s work as a vocalist and voice teacher, I’ve been thinking about the elegant connections involved in the voice, vocal study and servant-leadership. If art imitates life, then art and creative expression help us encounter new light, truth and revelation. Certainly, learning to use the voice is tied to learning to be fully human.

Vocal singing, study, training and execution draws pictorial allegories to some of the same issues people confront while growing in servant-leadership. Both are essentially about relationships with people, and growing people through those relationships.



It's a very ancient saying,
But a true and honest thought
That when you become a teacher,
By your pupils you'll be taught.
As a teacher I've been learning
(You'll forgive me if I boast)
But now I've become a pupil
Of the subject I like most:
Getting to know you.

—Anna in *The King and I*

The training of the voice stands apart from other types of instrumental instruction because many of the concepts must be communicated mainly through visual imagery, not by means of a manual application. It often results in a close encounter between student and teacher on the level of human relationship. Vocal training, if done well, forms a growing relationship between people while they work and create together. A unique challenge for communication develops: the student must be able to see, hear, understand and experience the concept on his or her own instrument, not one the teacher can access for personal demonstration. The outcome can mean deepened interpersonal communication, and more transcendent relating to the physical world encountered every day. The experiences of servant-leadership are similarly aligned. The voice of both singer and leader is intrinsically connected to who we are, what engages our thought life, and what connects us to our spirit and innermost being.

The central figure of the story is Leo, who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song. He is a person of extraordinary presence. (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 1)

In his essay “The Servant as Leader,” Robert Greenleaf gives us a picture of the person who has found his or her voice. In Leo, the servant that accompanies a band of men on a mythical journey, we see someone



wholly integrated and comfortable with the movement between serving and leading. He moves people through spirit, song and presence.

In becoming more familiar with the model of the servant-leader in Greenleaf's writings, ten personal characteristics stand out as noted by Larry Spears, author, editor and Executive Director of the Greenleaf Center: listening, awareness, building community, commitment, conceptualization, empathy, foresight, healing, persuasion, and stewardship. In the "art of the voice," used by both artist and servant-leader, the ten characteristics become paramount.

For the leader and singer both, everything comes into play when we open our mouths to connect breath to expression and draw it forth into voice. As the singer engages mind, soul and body to impart meaning and life through music, the need for personal knowledge is vital. The artist is immediately faced with his or her limitations in terms of ability and experience for the task. Is this piece at my level? Is it going to be a stretch? Will I be able to commit to practicing it and to the level of mastery needed to perform it? Where do I need to focus on technical aspects of the music, nuances and emotional delivery? What fears am I facing in taking on this challenge? What stylistic changes that are new to me need to be made in performance of this piece? What was the composer trying to communicate? Is this even suitable for my voice? Am I taking on something that is clearly beyond my ability?

And what of the leader when taking on a "new piece of music" in the organization: is the staff ready for something like this? Will we be willing to stretch as needed to accomplish the task? Am I asking something of our organization that is outside our capabilities? If not, what technical issues do we need to practice and master in order to "perform" at our optimum? Will we "face our fears" in taking this on, in risking failure? Are we willing to be vulnerable?

Being self-aware includes being in touch with the physical self and how it is so intricately woven with our emotional and spiritual being. The voice is not just the "voice box" or house protecting the chords; it is the



emergence of heart, mind and inner strength connected to breath which, set through these minute pieces of tissue (a miracle of nature in themselves), becomes something larger than just a reflection of one or more parts. Likewise, a servant-leader, in artistically engaging “the song,” becomes keenly aware of him or herself, and must be aware of how the individual presence is connected in a mysterious way to the body, spirit, heart, and breath of the collective voice that is making music in the organization. In their book *Spiritual Capital*, Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall share further insight into this notion of self-awareness and spirit.

The word spiritual comes originally from the Latin *spiritus*, which means “that which gives life or vitality to a system”. . .For human beings, that which gives life—indeed that which gives unique definition—to our humanity is our need to place our enterprises in a frame of wider meaning and purpose. The spiritual in human beings makes us ask why we are doing what we are doing and makes us seek some fundamentally better way of doing it. It makes us want our lives and enterprises to make a difference. (2004, pp. 28-29)

When one embraces this mentality of abundance, then servant-leadership becomes a means to realizing that the whole is exquisitely greater than the sum of the parts.

What are the parts? For the singer, the parts are the possible limitations of a given body makeup, the resonating chamber, the size and length of the vocal chords (which determine the voice range in which a person is able to sing). For the organization, it is the size of the group, the talents represented, and the potential of individual and communal leadership capacity. Both vocalist and organization, in facing and overcoming their given limitations, can “sing in a key” that is natural or built into their collective voices in order to “sing” and live and work in ways that are meaningful to the world. This ability to excel within the given gifts of a group is a characteristic that I believe sets the servant-leader apart from those who choose to lead by fear, authority and control. The risking of self, knowing self-limitations,



and being comfortable with those limitations in relationships reflect the artist core of a servant-leader.

Unlike any other instrument, voice demands the willingness of the performer to engage in a level of openness and honesty that is inherently personal. The voice is not taken out of a case or tuned externally. It is an instrument connected to the wholeness of the human person. A singer cannot alter the weather or control humidity to keep the instrument in tune; unlike instruments protected by man-made cases, the voice is encased in the human body. When the body is ill, the person may be overwhelmed or stressed; when the body is bumped or damaged, no hardcover case protects it. Singers play on their instruments under varied circumstances with no insulation; singers are painfully aware of internal and external influences of the nature of the day and where life hurts; it comes through in their singing, loud and clear. In Greenleaf's understanding of the singer-servant Leo, a complicated mystery is unveiled and we see what the singer is striving for in being aware—that the spirit, soul and body are inseparable and are reflected in the presence of the whole person in performance. Strikingly, those who embark on the journey of love in their respective organizations find their own voice is readable, discernible, and becoming light to others by listening empathically and deeply invoking others' true song.

Most of us at one time or another, some of us a good deal of the time, would really like to communicate, really get through to a significant level of meaning in the hearer's experience. It can be terribly important. The best test of whether we are communicating at this depth is to ask ourselves, first, are we really listening? Are we listening to the one we want to communicate to? Is our basic attitude, as we approach the confrontation, one of wanting to understand? (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 11)

Singing often opens up emotional wounds “locked in our tissues”—wounds that require redressing or the voice will be hindered. The nature of bringing physical breath to art form often brings these areas in need of healing to the surface. I have been impacted by this phenomenon as student and teacher both. When it happens, a keen teacher, as a keen leader, sees



that the need to embrace the interference is more pertinent to the moment than the study of vocal technique. The voice teacher and/or servant-leader becomes an instrument of healing for the student or follower.

Deep listening often unlocks the potential greatness of the singer to meet Greenleaf's best test of servant-leadership: becoming healthier, freer, wiser, more autonomous and more likely to serve! Empathy is one of the reasons good voice teachers are considered personal mentors or spiritual directors. They read between the lines of what is being said or not said, sung or not sung, discerning where the student is emotionally, physically and spiritually on a given day. How the teacher responds to what is being shared is crucial to uplifting the "hidden wholeness" (Palmer, 2005) in the student.

Ilana Rubinfeld, trained as a conductor at the Juilliard School of Music, writes in her book *Listening Hand*:

Soon I was able to hear the whole from the sum of its parts and then I learned to transmit this vision to the players, not through verbal commands but by using my face, my body and especially my hands. I could cradle the music, hold it in my hands and hold it out to the players. My hands could both listen and speak. . . Like music, healing involves the capacity to listen to others and hear their inner song. Hearing silence as well as sounds is part of music, so the healer learns to listen to both sounds and silences. Impulses, needs, emotions and feelings in people are expressed through sounds and silences, words and wordless movements of the body. The healer listens to all these variations and helps the client achieve harmony. (2000, p. 5)

There is something marvelous about teaching voice that nurtures and encourages the musical healer to read behind and between what the voice is saying. I once had a student who had a large gap between her head voice and her chest voice. After deep probing, it was apparent that her "little girl" voice and her "professional trainer's" voice were representative of two different styles of life manifested in her daily interactions. One voice she used for her family, illustrative of her desire to please and be a good girl. The



other she used to reflect respect, authority and responsibility. It became apparent that her voice fatigue and constant vocal chord irritation were the result of her not being able to bridge the two and bring forth her authentic self. Yet this meant spending time dealing with personal underlying issues and encouraging her to be courageous in looking inside herself to resolve the matter. I also encouraged her to play more, what she felt was an unexpected gift of the voice lesson! This scenario is similar to challenges presented to the leader who serves by listening. The deep work of love in an organization brings personal issues to the surface. The servant-leader doesn't attack or ignore, but embraces and creates a space for healing. I have always valued my voice teachers as good healers who were there at critical junctures and later proved to be markers of wisdom and prophecy in my life.

When contemplating a given exercise, the singer asks questions that lie at the very heart of the use of the voice, such as, for what purpose am I going to share my gift? Who is my audience? How can I speak life to people and what will be my medium? This is true for solo performing as well as choral exercise or dramatic singing in oratorio or opera. The concept of awareness is now coupled with conceptualization and foresight, and the desired end is realized in building community for the joy and wellbeing of others.

The Sound of Music, Rodgers and Hammerstein's delightful adaptation of the true story of the Von Trapp Family Singers and their escape from Nazi-occupied Austria, weaves a wonderful tale of how the voice is instrumental in building community. Maria, a young Catholic postulant sent to the Von Trapp home as temporary governess, shares the gift of communal singing and brings love, joy, healing and life to seven children bereaved of a mother and under the control of an austere father who has lost his dreams.

In an especially poignant scene, Maria invites the children on an excursion to the Salzburg hills where she too, in loneliness and need, found joy through song and freedom of expression. Knowing the children are forbidden to sing by their father, Maria risks her position as governess by



overriding his authority. Starting with total simplicity, “at the very beginning,” she begins to teach them to “find their voices” by using the solfege method of singing, or “do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do.” From this base of technical simplicity, she weaves the notes into songs with skill, rhyme, imagination, balance and teamwork. The songs demand give and take and contributions from all voices, both large and small. The children not only find pleasure, but also their wounded, fragile hearts begin to heal of the rift generated by a lack of fatherly presence and spirit. Maria takes a major risk in addressing such wounds, knowing no further healing would take place should the wounds go uncared for. In the midst of the children’s creativity, fun and play, they aren’t even really aware of what she has set out to do. Her next move of brilliance follows as she teaches them to test their newfound musical skills by working together on their native country song, “Edelweiss,” to share with their father, in an act of love and forgiveness.

Maria, as teacher, has both led and served. She led the children to a place of beauty and risk and helped them find their heart’s desire while at the same time serving them through her own vulnerability, honoring their places of fear, sharing her own story of presence in order to encourage. This marked the beginning of their communal story as friends whose love grew to make them a family.

Fraulein Maria had an astonishing gift of conceptualization, an important keystone of servant-leadership, and one that many singers miss. Singing is in the body and outside the body at the same time, requiring the singer to take what he or she has and throw it into mid-air, and learn to place muscles and vibrations that cannot be directly touched and place them to maximize their effectiveness. The vocal chords are minute tissues residing in the larynx. . . the singer must visualize the making of the notes in the brain and then engage the brain to execute this to the larynx while concentrating on so many other things at the same time! Leadership often requires the same juggling of skills. Like Maria, the leader must be able to see the place where the group needs to go, before getting there. The leader also visualizes what medium will be the most helpful in achieving that end,



while at the same time “throwing” love and discipline into the mix and hoping they land where intended.

Barry Green, author of several books relating to conceptualization, wrote in *The Inner Game of Music*,

If you can't hear it in your head, you can't play it. . . when you can hold the sound and pitch of the music clearly in your head in this way, performing it accurately becomes easier. Your body has a sense of its goal. Effectively, you are playing a duet between the music in your head and the music you are performing. (1986, p. 60)

Whether it is projecting the voice, sustaining a sequence of notes, climbing a scale, or “throwing your voice,” the total exercise of music requires the mental visualization of execution or completion prior to delivery. Robert Greenleaf encouraged just such a precise understanding of foresight and conceptualization as key ingredients to a servant-leader's being able to draw followers into a compelling vision to accomplish a great dream.

What the singer receives as an “aha” in a voice lesson one day is easily lost before the body is trained to remember it, a commitment to something you can't put your fingers on and play again. Ask any vocalist who has had a bad practice or bad performance; he or she will tell you that it isn't uncommon to want to hide the instrument away for good where no one can hear it and be sure to never take it out again! Many of the principles of servant-leadership at their core sound noble, but in truth they require great discipline to master, and anyone who has ever embarked on hard personal change knows the journey is often long and exhausting. If one is motivated and willing, however, the price is minimal compared with the blessings found.

Indeed, this concept of commitment translates directly into vocal training as we consider the need to practice and refine the art as a “habit” and discipline. Prominent leadership expert Stephen Covey has written on this very subject, and named his book *The 8th Habit*. His book, though not



written from the standpoint of a voice teacher, highlights the need for personal integration to be exercised as a habit that is then clearly reflected in the personality, character and authenticity of the human being, which is then resonated through the human voice. And the voice, more than any other instrument, is a challenge to get a handle on, due to the fact that one doesn't play on it, like a cello or a flute. One plays "in it," so to speak, as we do the nitty-gritty of our character. If life is flowing, all is well, but deeper tests for the artist arise when life is degraded or immensely difficult. Servant-leaders cultivate the same perseverance during dark seasons and model honest but also radiant resilience in the journey.

My first tenure with formal voice study in high school required that I drive to another town, pay for my own lessons, and work outside of school to pay for the gas and the lessons. It was definitely something I wanted to do — the crucial necessity of passion in pursuing any given discipline, be it musical arts or servant-leadership. But the real first hurdle came in learning to sing the "e" vowel correctly. The goal of the classical singer is to get the voice into the resonant space high in the head so that the sound has room to vibrate. Choral music usually consists of oohs and ahs and O sounds, which make for good blending of voices and are relatively easy to produce. The "e" vowel is one that takes immense visual and breath work. But once the singer achieves the feeling of the buzz or a tingle in the "mask" or resonating chamber, the sound can grow fuller and the singer can begin to sense some achievement. Tremendous core physical power is required to hold the air there. If not maintained, this core power is lost. Servant-leadership necessitates similar mastery and motivation. Servant-leadership evokes hard work, sacrifice, and a form of love that is as directly powerful as it is lovely and life-giving. Singers persevere toward the opportunity to find the mask's sweet spot, to feel that vibration and the coming together of artistic energy. The reward of servant-leadership is the same joy of accomplishing that which is immanently worthwhile, that which loves and serves the world.

In my view of the world there are people whom I would call spirit carri-



ers. . . those servants [who] find the resources and make the intensive effort to be an effective influence. The spirit is power, but only when the spirit carrier, the servant as nurturer of the human spirit, is a powerful and not a casual force. (Greenleaf, 1996, pp. 46, 48)

Once singers are comfortable in their skin, so to speak, they must find their center—their station of power from which to execute their voice. I think this is central to the admonition to “finding our voice.” Ironically, for the singer, it has more to do with using the breath (the power), being totally grounded physically, and through complete relaxation of the voice box, releasing the sound to find its resonating chamber in the head. The less the neck and throat area are tight or strained, the better the flow of air and the greater the resonance potential for the sound to spin in the mask. This is true of leadership as well. A servant-leader can resonate presence more acutely after having found grounding in his or her personal core. In leadership as in singing, being wishy-washy, twisting and turning can waste energy and keep life from being directed toward a place of resonance. The servant-leader, like the singer, must have strength of technique and holistic discipline to hold the “well of energy” or breath so that it can go where intended. This, like all musical discipline, requires practice. But once discovered through the discipline of the art form, it gets easier and easier, and builds confidence. Ironically, more breath and core power are necessary to sing softly than to sing loudly. This is true of leadership as well. As a friend once said, “Vulnerability and control are really distant cousins juxtaposed on the opposite ends of the spectrum.” Both the singer and the servant-leader discipline themselves to hold the tension between the two, whether executing a pianissimo or holding a relationship in balance.

Like good relational leadership, singing offers wonderful health benefits as well. Good vocal singing, using lots of breath, is a natural de-stressor, a detoxifier of the body and blood that helps the body produce natural endorphins, the hormones that give a good feeling after exercise. Great synergy in leading and serving can be a natural detoxifier of bad blood in a group, a source of joy and healing, and ultimately result in a great feeling of



accomplishment. In both, when exercised regularly, we feel toned and joyful and we sleep well after a hard day's work.

The glory of God is the human being fully alive.

– Ireneus

Once the singer has found presence and has connected with breath and heart (spirit), the singer is ready to share the gift of song, his or her *opus dei*. This is the culmination of the unique attributes that set each person apart from another and make each person's contribution in living so important and significant to the benefit of others.

My student said she knew she should sing, wanted to sing, and that it brought her joy. And using song, Leo served the men on their journey. Maria Von Trapp found her place in the mountains, and her singing was a contribution that had profound effect on encouraging the joy, healing, and gifting of others. Ilana Rubinfeld uses her hands, not only to read people's heart scores in music, but as instruments of healing in physical therapy as well. Whatever our gifts are, I believe we are given them by God to use them. Stewardship is crucial. If we are given a gift or talent and withhold it, we suffer. Tom Paterson writes, "To a gifted musician, artist, writer, dancer, scientist, nurse, teacher, engineer—whatever the area of gift—there is no sense of living fully unless the person is doing her gift" (1998, p. 140). He understood the correlation between doing work and making it a joyful art, while doing the work. As persons who need the mutual blessing of both sharing with and receiving from others, when we create opportunities to encourage stewardship of individual and collective giftings and resources, we treasure and further develop all humanity

Like the legacy Robert Greenleaf left us through his understandings of human relationship, many of the greatest voice teachers today, who once had glorious careers as singers, are finding their greatest fulfillment pouring their musical wisdom into up-and-coming younger talent. Vocal training doesn't end when the voice loses tenor! If the mind is still active, a great singer can become a wonderful teacher. One of my first professors in col-



lege was Gerhard Husch, a famous lieder singer and performer in Germany, who was sharing his stewardship well into his eighties as a visiting professor at several universities. Imagine the years of voices he had heard and sung with in that lifetime! Dr. Husch was free to share his expertise through images and visualizations with the added bonus of years of experience. Not bound by ego and or career tenures, servant-leaders with years of life experience are free to share the joys of their journeys and living a full life with those who are seeking the same.

The ability to withdraw and reorient oneself, if only for a moment, presumes that one has learned the art of systematic neglect, to sort out the more important from the less important—and the important from the urgent and to attend to the more important, even though there may be penalties and censure for the neglect of something else. . . The servant-as-leader must constantly ask himself, how can I use myself to serve best? (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 12)

Today there is growing concern, and rightly so, about the potentially severe limits our very techno-savvy, noise-driven culture is placing on our lives. The exhortation to “find your voice” couldn’t come at a more critical time. Finding the voice, the person, the spirit, the reason for being, if you will, may be seen as a prophetic word to the future leaders of our day. Whether the passion is Access Hollywood, decorating with Martha, cooking with Emeril, watching the stock market ticker tape, ESPN, CNN, Fox-24/7 cable news, the golf channel or just net surfing, there is more information, more to watch, listen to, and take in every day. Many of us have lost the ability to be at ease in silence and to take time for reflection.

Unencumbered, unstructured time for reflection is lessening as our work often demands more of the individual in terms of energy to process mass amounts of information. This carries with it the liability that one can spend more of oneself on doing rather than being, and it is confirmed by the numbers of people who are drained, exhausted, over-run, angry and out of breath. Many have little or nothing to say of lasting importance. The creative juices become dry, and many express a renewed hunger for a simpler



lifestyle. Is there any correlation between finding the voice and finding our lives? If so, what questions do we need to begin asking?

For when I hear a man discussing virtue or any wisdom who is a true man and worthy of the words he speaks, I am overjoyed; I put the speaker and the speech together to see how they fit and harmonize. And such a man seems to me properly musical, turned to the fairest harmony, not of the lyre or pleasant instruments, but actually tuned in his own life between words and deeds, not in the Ionian, nor yet in the Phrygian or Lydian; but in the Dorian, the only one of the harmonies truly Hellenic. Such a man makes me delight in his voice, and you would consider me a lover of talk, so eagerly do I take in what he says. (Plato, 1996)

To find our lives and “fine tune them to their fairest harmonies,” we will need to listen acutely to hear our inner frequencies, our own heart strings, and honestly ask ourselves: To what are we being tuned? Putting aside the temptations of entertainment and noise, we do better by setting aside the time, as all serious musicians do, to practice and rehearse and vision the music to be played for the performance of our lives. In art and life, it is the necessary and essential sacrifice.

As a leader (including teacher, coach, and administrator) one must have facility in tempting the hearer into that leap of imagination that connects the verbal concept to the hearer’s own experience. . . one of the arts of communicating is to say just enough to facilitate that leap. (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 11)

The road to personal growth and mastery can be taxing. It demands deep reflection, personal accountability, skills training, and great personal motivation to change. Commitment and dedication are required. The friendship of a good teacher/leader, then, becomes invaluable. The art of persuasion, encouraging the student/follower/co-leader to stretch, grow and risk is not only necessary, but also highly engaging, and will often make the difference in how a person looks back on his or her life.



My life is my message.

—Mahatma Gandhi

Finding one's voice is not merely an exercise in putting on a new outfit and being someone different. It certainly doesn't happen in a day, in a fortnight, or even a year's time. The struggle to come into life's graceful and beautiful tuning takes a lifetime—it is the journey.

To be joyful in the universe is a brave and reckless act. The courage for joy springs not from the certainty of the human experience, but the surprise. Our astonishment at being loved, our bold willingness to love in return—these wonders promise the possibility of joyfulness, no matter how often and how harshly loves seems to be lost.

—Molly Fumia (www.christ-community.net/Sermons)

Neither a lofty degree of intelligence, nor imagination, nor both together go to the making of a genius. Love, love, that is the soul of a genius.

—attributed to W.A. Mozart

The exhortation to find one's voice, though bold, need not be received with a sense of burden, but rather with promise and joy. It is the gift of life, the promise of being fully alive, fully integrated, and sharing who we are without fear. Fearless, rather, we share who we are with *clara voce*—clear voice. Clear shining voices, radiating the greeting of the heart and spirit to one another, are humanity's sweetest song. And, like Fraulein Maria with the children, in being our best selves, sharing from that deep well of love, we are full of fun, using our imaginations, risking, healing, and finding new joy while changing the lives of others.

May we fully enjoy each other's presence, spirit, and song!

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