

How to Appreciate Your Voice While Living with a Chronic Voice Disorder

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It's World Voice Day! World Voice Day is all about celebrating your voice. The theme this year is "Focus on Your Voice". I don't think many of you have to be told this, as the focus likely is already often on your voice. If you're like many others right now you may be struggling with your voice during these challenging times. I've been through and still deal with similar challenges. However, I'm going to share part of my story here about how I've learned to appreciate my voice living with a chronic voice disorder, spasmodic dysphonia, and will challenge you to hopefully do the same in some way!

I developed spasmodic dysphonia 10 years ago. To say it has been a roller-coaster is an understatement! However, I will say that there are many positives that have come about because of my spasmodic dysphonia. Yes, you read that right! Some of you reading that statement may be laughing (and trust me, I know the feeling of thinking that a chronic disorder is significantly debilitating in all aspects of quality of life). BUT throughout my journey I have learned to also develop different appreciations, especially my voice.

As I had the chance to experience this disorder I began to grow into acceptance. I had (and don't get me wrong, still sometimes have) my extremely frustrating moments with this disorder. Many things are more challenging because of it and living with a long-term voice disorder comes with psychosocial effects and can take an emotional toll. It takes a lot of strength to deal with a chronic voice or communication disorder each day – to experience the frequent frustration of not being able to communicate with others effectively and to have it affect your social life, job, or relationships even, is no small thing. But in fighting these invisible battles each day you gain a certain inner strength and possibly even a form of resilience after a bit – if you choose to recognize your own strength. It has made me realize that although there will be times during which I'm challenged with my voice, I will accept those challenges and do my best to deal with them and overcome them. I appreciate the small wins. And I try not to allow the sound of my voice to get in the way of what I feel like I need to say. I now appreciate the fact that I have a voice at all, that I'm able to manage with the tools I've learned along the way and that I have my overall health, along with many things. Many people take all of this for granted each day – how lucky are we that we get a chance to recognize the true power of communication?

I've also learned to be more patient, withhold judgment (who knows what invisible battles others are also facing?), offer more love and support to others, develop a strength I didn't know was in me, and I've turned my greatest challenge into one of my greatest passions.

Now I'm not sharing this to minimize in any way the struggle of a chronic voice disorder. It is so very challenging and trust me, I understand that. But when it feels like a more challenging day or like you want to throw something or give up, try shifting your perspective. What DO you have? What makes you feel grateful? What positive things have perhaps come from spasmodic dysphonia (this may be hard at first but I'm sure you can actually think of a few things)!

Some ideas may include:

- Now being a better listener
- Gaining an internal strength
- Appreciating those in your life who understand the disorder (as much as they can without having it) and support you
- Learning the power of communicating even without words
- Having a community of supportive individuals through the NSDA or Spasmodic Dysphonia Facebook page who uniquely understand your challenges and who you can connect with from afar
- Not taking anything for granted or learning how to be grateful

You can shift your perspective. Repurpose this challenge, this disability, this disorder (whatever you want to call it). It does not have to define you. Grow from it. Learn from it. Let it challenge you and rise to the challenge. Figure out what shifts you need to make. Try some voice therapy (from a qualified voice therapist) and use the tricks that help. Find a job where you don't have to answer phones or talk all day if that is leading you to greater misery (shifting your path or career because of this may end up being a blessing in disguise like it was for me – who knows, maybe you'll find a new passion!) . Redefine what your life means and how you feel purposeful. Give back to others. Maybe donate to the [NSDA](#), lead a support group, help a disability advocacy group. Find something that does not exacerbate your biggest challenges, redefine your values and activities, acknowledge your strength in this, recognize the small wins, and perhaps find some good in this disorder (the bright side DOES exist, I promise!).

More information and posts on my perspective on living with a voice disorder while being a speech language pathologist can be found on speakingboldly.com/blog-1

Happy World Voice Day to all!