

# **YOUR VERY BEST VOICE**

*"Your Very Best Voice"*  
by Alicia Dara  
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The human voice is not just a vehicle of communication, it is a powerful instrument of emotion, presence, and connection. As unique as a fingerprint and as vital as a heartbeat, your voice helps you connect with others, and make your place in the world. Improving your voice can have a measurable effect on your life as you learn to project your personal strengths when you speak. These qualities can be your signature whenever you're faced with a new challenge.

A strong voice is certainly associated with leadership, but the purpose of building a voice is not to dominate others, or intimidate them with your presence. Rather, it's important to train your voice in service of your community- particularly in the workplace, in group social settings, or in a crisis, your voice can help facilitate an outstanding experience with your vocal skills. Being able to speak clearly and with confidence makes your communication more effective, instills confidence in others, and shows people where you stand. It also sets the tone for the group, and helps the group dynamic flow the way it should.

This short booklet is designed to help you create your very best voice. It contains information, techniques, and tips that I've gathered over 20 years as a professional voice teacher and coach.

I hope you find it helpful! Please feel free to contact me directly if you would like private coaching, or a workshop for your team.



Sincerely,

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## THE THREE ESSENTIALS OF VOCAL STRENGTH

In order to be an effective public speaker, you must be able to project your voice. Projection comes from strong, sustained breath support provided by the diaphragm muscle. Volume is important, but speaking at a consistent high volume sounds a lot like shouting. Using your voice's natural resonance is much more compelling, and will help showcase your own unique vocal qualities. The "Three Essentials of Vocal Strength" are designed to help your voice become strong, flexible, and memorable. They involve your entire body, from head to toe, for this purpose.

### ① POSTURE AND ALIGNMENT

Standing and sitting with good, supported posture is crucial to the power of the diaphragm muscle. It's also important for the position of your head and neck to be relaxed but aligned, so that your vocal cords can work properly without extra tension. Make sure that your middle section is upright, supported by your back muscles, so that your belly can expand as you inhale. Develop the habit of making postural adjustments every time you sit down or stand up, and check in with your alignment during the day.

### ② BREATH SUPPORT

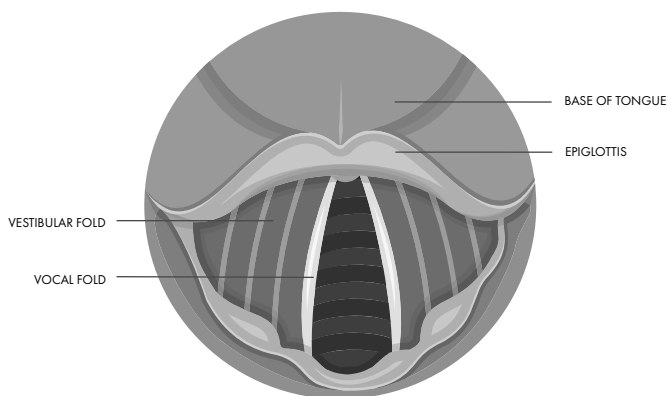
Strengthening your connection to the diaphragm muscle and learning how to breathe deeply and effectively, will help you bring your very best voice to everything you do. Practice breathing slowly and deeply whenever possible. Work with a voice teacher or coach who can design custom exercises that will build strength and stamina in your respiratory system.

### ③ **CENTER PITCH**

Most of us speak at a certain pitch that enables us to be heard in everyday conversation. For public speaking, we usually need to raise this pitch. Higher sounds travel farther, and you'll be able to better project if you are speaking slightly higher in your vocal range. It's important to note that raising your center pitch should not increase tension in your voice, but rather help you open up the natural resonance that is available to you with full breath support. This resonance is the most powerful expression of your voice.

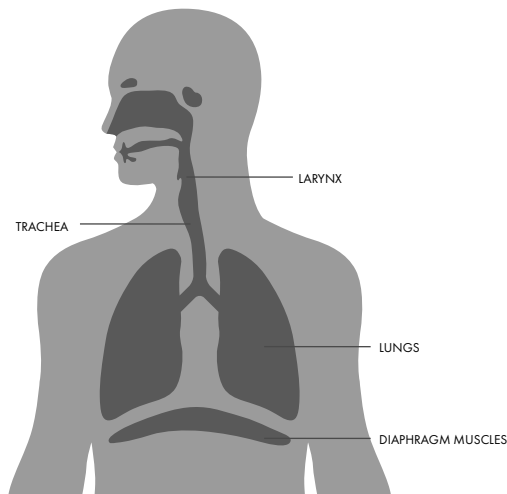
The feeling of speaking with strong breath support in your center-pitch, with full resonance, takes awhile to get used to. A good voice coach can help you work on your voice until it sounds and feels natural. Daily practice of the "Three Essentials" will also help you toward this goal.

## DIAGRAMS: VOCAL CORDS, DIAPHRAGM, AND PROPER POSTURE



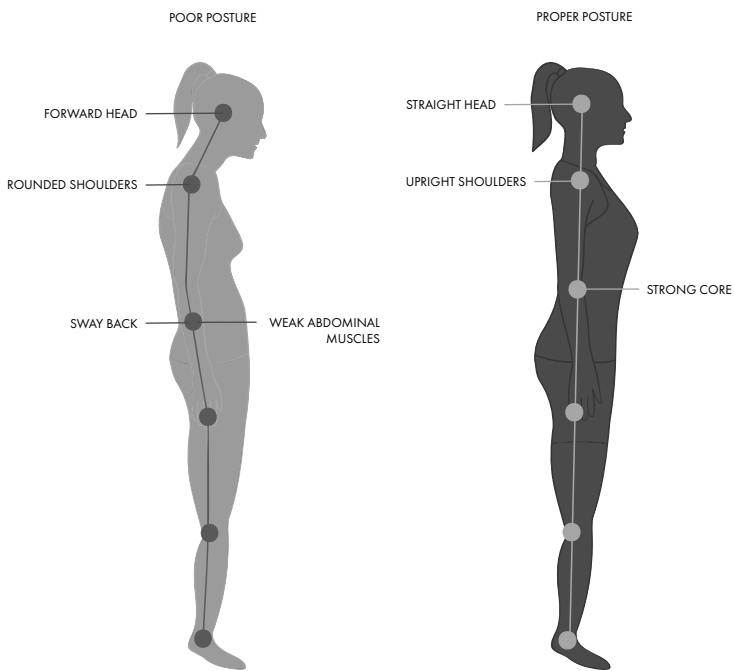
### VOCAL CORDS

Your voice is an instrument of communication, located at the base of the throat in an area called the larynx, and is about twice the size of a quarter. The larynx sits on top of the trachea (windpipe), which delivers air through the vocal cords as they vibrate, creating sound. The vocal cords are not made of muscle tissue, but like muscles they can get stronger and more flexible with proper exercise. Without breath support and good control of the diaphragm muscle, the vocal cords have to work too hard, creating tension, strain, hoarseness, and even loss of voice. It can take time to build proper breath support. A good voice coach can help you develop a regular practice routine, and instruct you on how to maintain it for maximum impact and improvement.



## DIAPHRAGM

Breath support is the key to a strong, resonant voice. Without it your vocal cords have to tighten and strain, causing problems that can damage your voice over time. The feeling of breath support comes from the respiratory system, but the lungs cannot inhale and exhale on their own. The diaphragm is the primary muscle used for drawing air into the lungs and pushing it back out again. We call the diaphragm the “Platform of Power” because its function is so vital to the strength and stamina of the voice. A proper inhalation should feel like expanding into the belly (NOT raising the chest and shoulders!). Imagine that you are inhaling and exhaling through the navel. Avoid tight belts, waistbands, and other garments that might prevent this movement.



## PROPER POSTURE

Proper alignment is essential for a strong voice. If you are slouching, leaning, or misaligned, you could be preventing the diaphragm from delivering full breath support to your voice. The feeling of proper alignment is active and engaged, but not tense. Whether sitting or standing, the middle section of your torso should be upright, supported by your back muscles, and your sternum should be lifted slightly. Allow the head to float lightly on the neck as the spine elongates and moves into place. When standing, keep your feet shoulder-width apart, and make sure your knees are unlocked. Don't allow your rear to stick out too far, tuck it under slightly until you find a middle position that feels strong but relaxed.



## PRACTICE TIPS

The voice you have is yours to work with. *Your voice will grow stronger and more confident only if you practice regularly.* When you have a public talk coming up, plan for a minimum of 3 weeks preparation if possible. Stand in front of a mirror and practice your body alignment, deep breathing, and center pitch as you go through your piece. Remember to warm up your voice before you start. Here are some everyday warm-ups that can help:

**Deep breathing:** Observe your breathing throughout the day and notice when it feels limited. Relax any tension and allow your belly to expand as you inhale (imagine that you're inhaling and exhaling through the navel). Especially when you feel anxious or nervous, practice this deep belly breathing and let it work its magic.

**Put on your favorite songs or music and hum along.** This is a great one to do on your commute. Humming is a light, gentle way to get your voice moving. Stay within a comfortable range, not too high or too low, until you feel your voice getting warmer.

**Vocal dives:** Pick a note near the top of your vocal range and, using the syllable "HAH", fall down to the lower part of your range (stop before you get to the very bottom). You can do this with all the vowel sounds. Start at a quiet volume, and gradually get louder as your voice starts to stretch out. Remember to take a deep belly breath before each one.

**In noisy social situations, practice talking higher, not louder.** Make sure to use full breath support to minimize vocal strain. Carry lozenges with you and use them when needed.

# GOOD AND BAD HABITS

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## THE GOOD

**Vocal rest:** Your voice was not meant to be used 24/7. Like all of your body, it needs to rest and recharge in order to work properly. Regular sleep is essential, but you might also need to rest your vocal cords during the day, especially if you're feeling hoarse. Wear a sticker that says "Vocal Rest", and point to it when someone wants to speak with you. Stay completely mute for 2-3 hours and let your voice rest and heal.

**Regular cardiovascular exercise:** Your voice depends on strong support from the diaphragm and lungs. Keeping your respiratory system in great shape will help you build the best voice you've got. Even light cardio, like walking, can have a good effect.

**Boosting immunity:** Colds, coughs, and flu can take a huge toll on your voice. Prevent them by maintaining good health habits and boosting your immunity when it feels low. Vitamin C, flu shots, and limiting sugar from your diet will go a long way toward keeping you, and your voice, healthy and strong.

**Hydration:** Water is vital to the condition of your voice. The tiny capillaries that pump blood to your larynx, and keep your vocal cords healthy and strong, will have to work much harder if you fall behind on your H2O intake. Start your day with a tall glass of water, and follow up with more later on.

*\*DISCLAIMER: Always check with your doctor before trying any new medicine or medical product, including vitamins, herbal medicines and homeopathic remedies.*

## **THE BAD**

**Smoking:** Smoking is the fastest way to weaken your voice. Avoid it completely if you want to sound your best, and stay away from secondhand smoke, woodsmoke, and any hot, smoky environment.

**Too much coffee and acidic foods:** Even a small amount of heartburn can cause acid from your esophagus to inch up and spill over onto the top of your vocal cords, especially when sleeping. This issue could have a huge effect on your voice if left untreated.

**Coughing:** The sound of coughing is the sound of your vocal cords scraping together, causing painful inflammation and hoarseness. Soothing and/or suppressing a cough keeps your vocal cords from weakening.

**Throat clearing:** Too much throat clearing can also cause inflammation on your vocal cords. Drink a sip of water and see if that fixes the problem before you scrape your vocal cords together. Take a deep breath before you speak so your voice is fully supported.

**Dairy products:** Dairy products create extra mucus in the throat, causing a need for continued throat clearing. Eliminate dairy from your diet to enjoy the clearest, purest sound of your voice.

*\*DISCLAIMER: Always check with your doctor before trying any new medicine or medical product, including vitamins, herbal medicines and homeopathic remedies.*

## HELPFUL SUPPORTS FOR YOUR VOICE

Your voice needs to be cared for and nourished in order to perform at its peak. The following is a list of items\* that can aid you in your voice care regimen:

**Ricola lozenges** - These lozenges are made with a special herbal formula that soothes and restores the throat. They have a sweet, herbal, slightly minty taste.

**Satori Vocal Rescue** - Throat spray that soothes and refreshes, with a minty/vegetal aftertaste. *(Contains herbal ingredients that may interact with drugs. Contains grain alcohol.)*

**Herb Pharm Soothing Throat Spray Immune Support** - Does double-duty as a powerful throat soother and immunity booster. A strong herbal taste that lingers. *(Contains herbal ingredients that may interact with drugs. Contains grain alcohol.)*

**Boiron Roxalia** - A homeopathic remedy for voice strain and hoarseness. This product is restorative, not curative. It can work well if taken right at the onset of symptoms, but it can't bring your voice back from total laryngitis. *(Check with your doctor before using Homeopathic remedies.)*

**Humidifier** - A humidifier in the bedroom can soothe your throat and respiratory system while you sleep. Choose a small one and place it close to the bed. Make sure to follow instructions for cleaning, and clean it regularly.

*\*DISCLAIMER: Always check with your doctor before trying any new medicine or medical product, including herbal medicines, vitamins, a humidifier, and homeopathic remedies.*

# “Your Very Best Voice”

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Alicia is a Seattle-based voice educator and creativity coach with over 20 years experience. Clients include members of Amazon, Microsoft, Seattle Trade Commission, Core Power Yoga, Windermere, and Planned Parenthood. She teaches “Public Speaking Bootcamp” workshops for corporate clients, and private lessons. Alicia’s “Vocal Strength for Attorneys” workshop is approved for CLE credits by the Washington State Bar Association. The 2-hour workshop takes place on site, and includes an informational lecture, demonstration, and individual voice coaching for each workshop participant.

As a singing teacher Alicia has taught many Seattle musicians including Nick Foster, Matt Strutyński (VanEps), Heather Thomas (Mary Lambert band), and members of Visqueen, Campfire OK, Maktub, Land of Pines, The Local Strangers, North Twin, The Blood Brothers, Pretty Girls, and The Break-Up. As a musician, she has released 5 solo records and 3 with her current bands Diamondwolf and The Volcano Diary.

Alicia is the founder of ADMC Creative, a consulting and coaching company for individuals and businesses who are interested in mastering their creativity through individual coaching, group workshops, office culture consulting, and lectures. Her writings about creativity have appeared on The Write Life, and Daily OM.

Contact Alicia directly to book a workshop or private lesson.

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## NOTES

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