

By **CYNTHIA ZHAI**
editor@leaderonomics.com

DO you find it a challenge to assert yourself, either in a professional setting or in your personal life? Asserting yourself means that you stand up for your own rights and defend your own boundaries while respecting others; and you express your opinions, needs, and feelings without hurting others.

I love this interpretation about assertiveness: to disagree without being disagreeable.

To assert yourself indicates your level of self-esteem and self-assurance. Lack of assertiveness can affect your career prospects and quality of life.

When you are assertive, you communicate more effectively and earn more respect.

Assertiveness is a very critical skill in communication. Within 0.36 seconds, you will find more than 14 million Google results on how to be assertive – think before you speak, don't apologise if it's not warranted, remember it is okay to say "no" – to name a few.

Yet, for years, none of them worked for me. I didn't achieve any breakthrough on assertiveness until I did my own voice study.

In practicality, we relate voices with personality traits, e.g. a deep voice comes across as credible, trustworthy, and authoritative; while a soft voice comes across as friendly, warm, or sometimes unsure.

DEVELOP AN ASSERTIVE VOICE

How does an assertive voice sound? Confident, grounded, and self-assured.

To sound that way, you need to know what makes a voice assertive in the first place.

When I first thought about developing my voice, part of me was doubtful while the other part thought: "Why not make some changes and see the results?"

I discovered my optimum pitch, developed resonance and monitored the cadence in my voice. The more I developed them, the more amazed I was looking at the results.

Not only did I tap into the potential in my voice, I also had a realisation in my mind.

By sounding more assertive, I realised

FROM PASSIVE TO ASSERTIVE

HARNESS THE POWER OF YOUR VOICE



that we all have our own desires, feelings, and opinions. Therefore, we should stand up for our own rights and defend our personal boundaries.

The changes prompted me to reflect on why it really worked, and I finally figured it out. You see, changes happen in two ways:

- Change the internal (your mind) and then the external (your behaviours/body) will follow; or
- Change the external (your behaviour/body), and the internal (your mind) will ultimately change.

In essence, changing either your mind or your behaviour/body will influence the other.

That is exactly how yoga works. We practise the external (our body, e.g. dif-

ferent postures) to discover and change the internal (our mind).

As one of the foremost yoga teachers Bellur Krishnamachar Sundararaja Iyengar (better known as B K S Iyengar) pointed out in his book *Light on Life*: "It is through the alignment of my body that I discovered the alignment of my mind."

YOUR TURN

Are you assertive enough? Are you still struggling to be more assertive? Are you disappointed at all your attempts to be more assertive?

Why not reverse the process by making external changes before anything else? Sometimes, the results might come even faster than making internal changes first.

In practicality, we relate voices with personality traits, e.g. a deep voice comes across as credible, trustworthy, and authoritative; while a soft voice comes across as friendly, warm, or sometimes unsure.

Like this article? Follow us @Leaderonomics on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.



To learn how to develop your leadership voice with more presence and impact, check out some of Zhai's tips on Leaderonomics.com: bit.ly/LFleadvoice

■ *Cynthia is a voice and speech coach, trainer and speaker, based in Singapore. She helps you discover your full voice that is authentic, confident and authoritative. She also helps organisations on voice and presentation skills training. Email us at info@leaderonomics.com to learn how to develop your leadership voice effectively.*

By **JEFF HADEN**
editor@leaderonomics.com

STORIES have power. Stories shape the way we think, the way we feel, the way we respond to certain situations... stories matter.

Especially the stories we tell ourselves.

(That's an underlying premise of Stoicism. Stoicism has nothing to do with being stone-faced and not showing emotion; Stoicism is a practical philosophy that says while we can't control everything that happens, we can control how we respond.)

How you decide to respond, to whatever happens around you and to you, is up to you – and responding the right way is a lot easier if you tell yourself the right stories, especially about yourself.

That's the premise of a cool new book by Bruce Kasanoff and Amy Blaschka, *I Am: Escape Distractions, Unlock Your Imagination & Unleash Your Potential*. Their goal is to shift the stories you tell yourself, not just from negative to positive but at a deeper level so you can unlock your imagination, creativity, and aspirations.

WANT A FULFILLING LIFE? IT STARTS WITH WHAT YOU SAY – TO YOURSELF

Kasanoff and Blaschka don't target your rational, logical, orderly side; plenty of books do that. Instead, they trust the power of your brain and heart to come up with amazing possibilities – to let you wander, explore, imagine, and experience as you discover ways to unlock your full potential.

Sound like a tall order? Maybe not. Here's one of my favourite portions of the book, partly because it's about willpower and determination (persistence is critical for achieving any huge goal) but also because I tried it -- and it works.

"I am persistent.
"I don't give up easily.
"I fight for what's right.
For what I believe in and for whom I love and admire.
"I search for the truth. My

truth. And the truths of others, never satisfied with what's on the surface, always digging deeper, letting my insatiable curiosity drive me. I want – and need – to know.

"I'm tenacious, in all the best ways.

"I don't get discouraged, even when things don't go my way. I use setbacks as motivators, criticism as fuel to be better.

"I know deep in my bones that what I'm doing matters and is important not only for my soul but for the lives of others. As I stay the course, I remain sweet because I know I will eventually succeed. And it is that thought of achieving my goals that motivates me to keep going."

Read that passage – out loud – to yourself before you leave for work. Or before you start a difficult task. Or whenever delaying gratification, withstanding temptation, overcoming fear... whenever you need to stay the course and do the things that matter most.

At first it might feel strange (or even uncomfortable) to read that passage out loud, especially if you're like me and tend to stick to "rational" ways to improve yourself. But give it a couple of days. It sinks in. It starts to inform how you not just look at things, but feel about things.

For example, I read that passage out loud once a day for three days, including this morning before I tried to do 1,000 pull-ups. (I sometimes come up with stupid goals to challenge myself, like the

time I did 5,000 push-ups in one day.)

About a third of the way into it I wanted to quit. That's what happens when we do things that require us to just put our heads down and do the work – at some point the distance to the finish line seems too far, and we want to quit.

But I didn't. I reminded myself that I am tenacious, in all the best ways. I reminded myself that if I stayed the course I would eventually succeed.

And eventually I did, even though it took me longer to do 1,000 pull-ups than I expected.

But that's okay. I set a goal, I hung in there, I did the work... I was persistent.

Today, I am persistent.

That's the power of the stories we tell yourself. Start telling yourself the right stories.

And you'll start getting the right results – the results you want.

■ *Jeff Haden is a speaker, ghostwriter, and author of *The Motivation Myth: How Highly Successful People Really Set Themselves Up to Win*.*