

Full transcript of Style School's Stasia Savasuk's TEDx Talk: **Dressing for Confidence and Joy** @ TEDxPortsmouth conference. To learn more about the speaker, read the bio [here](#).

Stasia Savasuk - Style School

What if changing your pants could change your life?

Here's a photo of my friend Dana from a couple of years ago, when she was wearing not quite right pants, working in a not quite right job. She didn't understand what was not quite right about either of them, but she intuitively knew that something was off.

So she joined my online program called [Stasia's Style School](#), with the hopes of getting some insights into her pants situation. But what she didn't know was that Style School would ultimately change the course of her life.

In Style School, Dana did some serious soul work and asked the big question: *"Who am I, and how do I want to show up in the world?"*

Her answer? Fierce. Grounded. Vibrant. Playful.

And so Dana went on a mission to find pants that connected her to those feelings. Except she couldn't find any. Turns out Dana doesn't like pants! She likes dresses.

So, she traded out all of her pants for a closet full of dresses. Dresses that connected her to who she was on the inside, that were congruent with who

she was on the inside.

And then a light bulb went off, and it occurred to Dana that her job wasn't congruent with who she was on the inside.

So do you know what she did? She left that not-quite-right job, and she started her own company — a company that is 100% aligned with who she is on the inside.

What if changing your pants could save your life? Meet Hannah. Two weeks after Hannah and I met in Style School, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. In those two weeks prior to her diagnosis, like Dana, Hannah had also done the work of asking the question, "Who am I, and how do I want to show up in the world?" So, when the diagnosis came, she was of course terrified.

But hell if she didn't get dressed every single morning according to how she wanted to feel, which was brave, strong and healthy. Her nurses could not believe that whenever they saw her, she was dressed up for cancer.

By starting each day remembering who she was and how she was going to live each day, it lifted her spirits, and it helped her believe that she could survive.

Most women with Hannah's diagnosis die within a year. Yet two years post-diagnosis, Hannah is still alive, and do you know what she told me? She believes that consciously deciding each day how she was going to show up for cancer is the reason she's still here today.

Change your pants, change your life. It's a motto that I believe in with my whole heart. But it hasn't always been that way.

I broke up with style when I was a teenager. I thought that it was petty,

trite and superficial. Because in my experience, clothes had one primary purpose: they were the liaison – or in most cases the barrier – between me and any social group I wanted to fit into.

In other words, I felt like there were these unwritten style rules out there that defined what I was supposed to wear, based on the set of cultural norms and expectations, and in order to fit in, I needed to satisfy those rules.

Except, I could never figure out the damn rules. Was I preppy? Outdoorsy? Bohemian? Classic? Sporty? I tried them all. And none of them ever fit.

I seriously thought I had an identity disorder, because I could not find the box that defined me. So I said, “To heck with style,” we broke up, and I accepted a life of beige yoga pants, fleece and sensible brown shoes.

And I became invisible. I lost my voice, I lost my laugh, and I convinced myself that it’s what’s on the inside that matters. I stood with my eyes down and my arms crossed, trying to make myself as small and as invisible as possible.

I used to tell people I was an introvert, but I can assure you I am not an introvert. I was an extrovert who was severely lacking confidence. In my effort to fit in, to find my box, I completely lost track of who I was.

For 15 years, I hid. When I was in my early 30s, I got pregnant with my first child. We were told, early on in my pregnancy, that our daughter was going to be born with a number of physical anomalies, both inside her body and outside her body.

We were told she might not survive pregnancy, let alone childbirth, and that if she did survive, she would look different than other kids.

Thankfully, my pregnancy went smoothly, and we had a beautiful and relatively uncomplicated childbirth. But because of her prenatal medical history, the doctors took her away for some extensive medical evaluation the second she was born. And I didn't get a chance to see her.

ALSO READ: [Monica Lewinsky on Price of Shame at TED 2015 \(Full Transcript\)](#)

She had survived, which was amazing. But I still didn't know what she looked like.

When the neonatologist finally brought her to me, she was swaddled in a baby blanket, with her face completely covered. He laid her in my arms and proceeded to tell me all the ways that she was wrong. Where he saw a compilation of extensive physical anomalies, some purely cosmetic and some that would compromise her ability to eat and breathe, I saw nothing but a beautiful baby girl who needed a fierce advocate and a damn good medical team.

I knew in that moment that we had a long road ahead of us, full of wonder and mystery and medical procedures, and it scared me.

But do you know what scared me even more? How was I going to raise a daughter who had both cranial, facial and limb differences, see and celebrate her own beauty when I couldn't see and celebrate my own.

We live in a culture where how you look matters. It is hard enough for those of us without physical differences to see and celebrate our own beauty. How was I going to raise a daughter who looked different than other kids see and celebrate her own beauty? And that's when I decided it was going to be my job to make sure that she fit in despite her physical differences.

See what I did there? I traded out "see and celebrate her own beauty" for

“fitting in,” as if the two were the same thing.

I decided that the best way for me to make sure that she fit in was to dress her in the cutest of dresses and bootcut jeans you’ve ever seen. And my strategy worked perfectly - till she turned two I would send her to the babysitter’s house wearing the sweetest little outfits, and every single time she came home, she was wearing the babysitter’s son’s clothes. She liked boy clothes, not the cute little dresses and bootcut jeans I was dressing her in.

In fact, do you know what she liked the most? The boy’s underpants. Because they had a pocket in the front. We battled for years: she wanted to wear boy clothes; I forced her to wear girl clothes.

Until one day, when paradigms shifted, boxes collapsed, and everything changed. We were shopping at a local thrift store when my daughter, Raissa, asked me to buy her a shirt and a necktie.

I said, “No,” just as I had done dozens of times before. Do you know what she did? She turned around, marched her five-year-old self over to the sales counter and asked one of the shop employees to help her. They went to the kids department together, found a shirt and a tie.

And when they returned, the sales lady could clearly sense my indignation because she started giving me this you-better-make-the-right-decision eyeball so I knew I had to buy the shirt and tie even though I didn’t want to.

As soon as we got home, Raissa raced into the living room, tried on her shirt and tie, looked into the mirror and took her own breath away. She said to me in a whisper, “Mama, look how handsome I look.”

Then she ran across the living room and said, “Mama, mama, look how

much faster I can run.” And then she jumped high into the air and said, “Mama, look how much higher I can jump when I’m wearing a shirt and tie!”

And it hit me: she could run faster and jump higher when she was wearing clothes on the outside that matched who she was on the inside.

Now, this isn’t a story about gender choice. This is a story of my daughter crushing a widely accepted societal box that says “This is what a girl should wear” and redefining for herself what it means to be a girl. All of my work up until that moment, forcing her to stand squarely inside the girl box, trying to protect her, trying to make sure that she fit in, was preventing her from seeing and celebrating her own beauty.

I was teaching her to abandon what she knew to be true about herself and to adopt other people’s expectations of who they thought she should be. I learned in that moment that in order to see and celebrate your own beauty, you have to know who you are on the inside. You have to truly see yourself.

I learned that style, how you show up in the world, isn’t petty, trite or superficial. It’s complex. It’s dynamic, and it has to be congruent from the inside out. I call it “**Inside-out Congruency**,” and Inside-out Congruency can never be defined by any box, or preconceived rules, or cultural norms and expectations that are designed by somebody else.

ALSO READ: [Nothing to Regret - Small Bad Habits Cause Lifelong Regrets: Iman Aghay at TEDxStanleyPark \(Transcript\)](#)

With this new understanding of Inside-out Congruency, I started noticing that the number of boxes we try to squeeze ourselves into - based on what we do, on other people’s expectations of us - is endless.

We know there are the gender boxes, that say, “This is what a girl should

wear, and this what a boy should wear.” But what about the professional box? The one that says, “This is what a lake ecologist should wear, this is what a librarian should wear, and this is what a woman working in a man’s field should wear.”

And what about the box that says, “This is what a woman over 40 should wear.” Or the one that says, “This is what a stay-at-home mama should wear.”

Remember how I had broken up with style because I couldn’t find the box that defined me? Well, I was a tree-hugging, world-traveling, kale eating, stay-at-home mama who broke with style because she couldn’t find her box.

So what did I do? I created a new box. And this box was defined by what I did, and not who I was. What I loved, but didn’t think I could get away with, were dresses, ruffles, bold jewelry and lipstick.

And it was so confusing for me because that is not what a tree-hugging, world-traveling, kale-eating, stay-at-home mama wears. On a Tuesday! Or is it?

I want to dive in a little deeper and talk about what **Inside-out Congruency** is and where you find it.

When I say congruency begins inside of you, I’m not talking about the tired, exhausted, worn-out you. I’m not talking about the you that needs to lose 10 pounds or start going to the gym, I’m talking about the essence of you. Your spirit –that place inside you that is pure, unadulterated magic.

As John O’Donohue, poet and philosopher, says, “There is a place in you that has never been wounded where there is still a sureness in you, where there is a seamlessness in you, and where there is a confidence and

tranquility in you.” That is where you go.

If you can connect to that part of you and define it, then you can answer the question, “Who am I?” And then imagine going to your closet and only choosing clothes that connect you to that you-ness.

Just think of the power that you possess underneath everybody’s expectations of who they think you should be. I want you to imagine two scenarios for a minute: In the first scenario, I want you to imagine my daughter, Raissa, as an 11-year-old girl, she’s standing on the playground, eyes down, shoulders forward, wearing a dress that leaves her feeling like a stranger in her own body.

Now imagine some kid, coming up to her, teasing her because she looks different than other kids. How is she going to respond? I’ve taught her that she’s perfect, just the way she is, as long as she fits within society’s norms and standards. But she doesn’t fit. She looks different. How could I ever expect her to see and celebrate her own beauty or fit in, when she’s a stranger in her own body.

Now I want you to imagine her again, but this time, standing tall and proud of her body, eyes forward, shoulders back, wearing a button-down shirt and a bow tie, completely sure of who she is. She’s right there.

Now imagine some kid coming up to her, teasing her because she’s wearing hearing-aids, or because she has a four-fingered hand, or because she’s wearing boy clothes. How is she going to respond? I’ll tell you how she responds because I’ve seen it happen on the playground time and time again. She hears their criticism of her body or her style, and you know what she does? She rolls her eyes, shrugs her shoulders, snickers and walks away.

If I’m within earshot, she knows mama is going to be on the side lines, smoke coming out of her ears, so she says to me, “Mama, don’t worry

about it. They're probably just having a bad day." They are having a bad day, and that is the power of Inside-out Congruency.

When you know who you are and where you belong, you don't have to wait for anybody else's approval. Style isn't really about the clothes. It's about who you are on the inside and how you choose to show up in the world.

So, do me a favor: When you go to get dressed tomorrow morning, don't ask yourself, "What am I going to wear today?"

Instead, I want you to pause, look into the mirror, take a deep breath, and ask yourself this, "Who am I, and how do I want to show up in the world?"

Thank you.

Sharing is caring! [Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Share on LinkedIn](#)[Share on Pinterest](#)
[Multi-Page](#)