

The following is the full transcript of the *The Surprising Secret to Speaking With Confidence* by Caroline Goyder at TEDxBrixton...

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Caroline Goyder - Author of Gravitas

It is this moment, isn't it? I'm looking at you, and you look like a really nice bunch with such great energy. I was sitting there for five minutes and it just feels great in this room.

And you look really friendly enough, so thank you! And you are looking a bit unsure, a voice coach. Don't worry, it's going to be fine. And I can see a couple of really brainy TED faces there. There's going to be few ideas too.

But it is this moment — this moment where our worlds are colliding right now. You are looking at me. I am looking at you, and it hits my brain with the feeling of adrenaline. Accelerating molecules you might say. And different people deal with this moment differently. Some of us go: Hey! You know, there are people who are confident. They cope with this moment totally fine. And then there are other people, not so confident, and it stops them from speaking this moment. It makes them feel anxious. It makes them feel that maybe they are not up to it. And that is not the case. Actually all of us have confidence within.

And what I want to talk about today is the idea that we can find more confidence within us if we know where to look. Where do we look? We go within. We look under the bonnet. That's where we are going next, and the reason I want to talk about this is because many years ago, I stood in front of an audience this big, bigger at Central Hall, which is by the Houses of Parliament, a really big Methodist space. I was super excited about that moment, because I knew that it was my big moment as a rookie voice coach and that I was going to be able to speak.

And I stepped up in front of that audience and what happened was everything that could possibly go wrong did. I went too fast, I lost my words. It felt like such a horrible experience. And just as I thought it couldn't go any worse, the microphone broke. And I looked out across the room and I said in my big voice — coach voice — there wasn't this much wind at the time I have to say - and I said in my big voice coach voice: *"Can you hear me at the back?"*

And someone said, *"Speak up!"*

And I just felt this feeling of absolute shame, that feeling of an audience looking at you, that feeling of judgment which cripples us. And I left that venue and I thought to myself, *"Never again"*. Clearly that didn't work because I am here. I also thought I am going to do it differently next time. I am going to make sure that the next time I stand up to speak it feels good. And where I had to go was within.

Now we live in a really visual culture. We spend a lot of time — if we think about two worlds, we spend a lot of time thinking about the outside, maybe especially for women. And actually confidence doesn't exist on the outside; it exists within, in the visceral stuff, in the bits within you that we don't see. And we're going to go to those bits.

And when I was thinking about this idea three months ago, when I was asked to do it, I started to feel nervous about this moment, I started to think about a quote that the director Peter Brook had said, which is that *we open new drawers in the self*. And I started to think about a chest of drawers. And then I came across this really cool maker called George McCollum, who is sitting there.

And I said to George, *"Can you make me a chest of drawers?"* And he did.

Now you might be wondering what this object is. And what this object is

here, is what George made. But when you ask a maker to make a chest of drawers, they don't always do what you think they are going to do. Do you want to see what he did? Yeah! Thanks George. Best response of the morning. Upstage by the furniture.

And within this little chest of drawers — this rather big, manly chest of drawers — are three secrets to finding confidence within. Three lessons that I had to learn on the way. That is a big lesson in here. The last lesson is the big one. We are going to get there, and it's not what you might think. It is a lesson that might surprise you.

But first, would you like to see inside the first drawer? It's a bit delicate, George. So what we have in here is an instrument. Because you've just been hearing the voice is the most amazing instrument. It's magnificent. How often do you think about how yours work? Because like this little guitar, it has a string and it has a hitter. Where is the string of your voice? You can handle it. Here give it a shake, your larynx. ahhhhh... can everyone do that for meeee? Ahhhhh... and then the hitter is the air.

Now when you know that your voice is an instrument, what does that tell you? People come to me and they say, *"Well I've got a bad voice."* *"I am not a good speaker."* *"I get worried about this kind of moment."* *"I hate meetings."* *"I hate presentations"* *"Can't do it."* The voice is an instrument. There is no such thing as a bad saxophone. Is there? Because when we hear a great saxophonist, and he is probably somewhere down here, what we know is that they practice a lot. That not only they have talent, but also they have worked, and worked and worked to get a great sound.

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Now, if you ever doubt the sound of you voice, let me tell you all you have to do is practice. And when I was worrying about that moment I am going

to call my Central Hall of shame because it was, what I remembered was the story of a guy in Ancient Greece called Demosthenes. Now, that's a bit of a big old name, so we're going to call him the Greek dude from now on, which actually is also a bit of a big word, so we might just call him Dave, I think.

Now Dave was speaking at the Assembly which is like the O2. We have Simon in the room. It's like the Brixton Academy of the Ancient Greek world. And he was feeling pretty nervous, he wanted to be an orator. Orators were the rock stars of their day. And so he geared himself up for this big moment at the assembly and you know what? He bombed. They said he was uncouth in his speaking, and that he stammered.

And so the audience jeered at him and they threw stuff. Please don't do that to me! And he left that stage feeling so downcast when he got a bit of advice from an actor. I'm sure Greek actors were pretty much the same as they are now. And I am sure that acting was a bit like this, but what he said to him is, *"You need more expression in your voice. You're just not giving enough welly, enough energy. And you also need to believe in yourself because the message is good."*

So Demosthenes takes himself back home and he goes for it. This is his rocky moment. He builds himself an underground cellar. He shaves his head, half of his head so that he can't leave the house for three months and then he practices for three months solid in front of a big shield that is polished like a mirror.

And when he is ready, when he is up there, he goes out. He goes to the sea and he speaks over the waves. So his voice has to boom out over the waves. And then he goes back. He goes back to the Assembly. And he speaks again and he becomes known as one of the greatest orators of his day. So what does that tell you? It tells you about practice. The power of practice.

Now, you may not want to shave half of your head; you may not build an underground cellar because the councilman may have words, but what you can do is practice. And the simplest way to practice is to sing. You don't have to do a big *mamamamahh* voice coach warm up unless you want to. But what I really recommend is to everyday sing somewhere: sing in the shower, sing in the car, sing on the tube if you feel brave.

I was at Saint Thomas Hospital for a blood test about two weeks ago and there were two women singing in this place where the blood test was happening which was lovely. So I recommend it. Singing is the way to a great voice. Practice is the way to a great instrument. So that's lesson one.

And we have another drawer which we're going to open in a moment, but before we get there I've got a question. Say you walk into a room, OK? You don't know anybody. Some of you may have had that feeling this morning. How do you know who the most powerful person in the room is? The person with the most confidence. That inner confidence is what we are going for here. How can you tell? How they carry themselves. That's lovely. You are in the same space, aren't you? Because you are a singer. It is that how they carry themselves. And actually an actor will tell you that it is about the breath. The most powerful person in the room has the most relaxed breathing pattern.

And there is a well known scientist called Paul Ekman who looks into emotion. And he said — which would make actors love because it seems so straightforward to them that maybe it isn't a science — that he couldn't understand why breath matters for a long time and he in his research explored it. Until he started to understand that the unconscious system, you know I can't control my spleen. It is just doing its own thing. But I can control my breathing. And if I get into my breathing, I get into the unconscious. I calm myself down.

So what's within you is the key to this relaxed confident power. Actors

know this because when actors are playing king, the king stays really still. Everybody moves around the king, and that's how you know the king is in charge. The next time you feel nervous about something, try that, try getting still.

Now within your body is something that is really the king of the body. It's what the Greeks called the center of all expression. And I bet that 50% of this room have never thought about it. Would you like to see what it is? Thank you. My still handsome friend.

OK, we've got our lungs, haven't we? We've got this which is probably not an anatomical representation of a heart, but it is nice. But what's down here? What's this?

[Audience: The diaphragm]

Thank you very much! Diaphragm. It is indeed your diaphragm. Now put your hands up if you have thought about your diaphragm recently. Put your hands up if you thought about your diaphragm today. Thank you singers in the room, or actors, or saxophonists. Put your hands up if you haven't yet thought about your diaphragm today. Yeah, that is quite a large percentage.

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So we don't think about our diaphragms, do we? But the diaphragm is the key to regulating your system. It is how you calm yourself down in that moment when you stand in front of all the audience. It will make you feel confident when you most need it and you least feel like it.

Now I didn't know anything about my diaphragm. I learned about it. I knew what it was supposed to look like, but I didn't know how it felt. And then one day, I was feeling really stressed. I was breathing up in my chest,

you know, I had that kind of squeaky high voice adrenaline breathing up in the chest. Not good.

And I walked into a yoga class, and the yoga teacher said, *“You look really stressed.”* Which is never a good start. He said, *“Lie down on the floor.”* And he laid me down and I closed my eyes expecting some lovely relaxing yoga thing and suddenly he put a gym weight on my stomach. And he said, *“Breathe, lift that.”* And I did. I breathed in and as I breathed in I had to lift that gym weight with my stomach and my diaphragm shot into action. And suddenly I got it. I got how it should feel. I got that I didn’t need to breathe up here anymore. I could breathe down.

And I’d like to suggest that the diaphragm is the king of confidence. So should we find yours? Will you take your thumb? And take your thumb and just put it below your bra strap. Yeah, that’s right, sir. You got it. That’s it. And just thumb there, and gently push. Now Laurence Olivier, when he was taught to breathe — Laurence Olivier. You know, the actor? — was taught to breathe by pushing a grand piano. I certainly don’t have a grand piano at home. London houses don’t fit them these days. Do they? But we can all practice the feeling of pushing a grand piano if you breathe in and push your thumb away. Now breathe out and push back. So you are filling an air balloon in your stomach. Now, breathe in, push your thumb away. Now breathe out, push it back. Welcome to your diaphragm.

And if you put your hands on your ribs, your diaphragm goes the other way around. You can also fill the rib cages as you breathe in. You feel the ribs open as you breathe and close as you breathe out. If you are ever nervous about one of these moments do that. Your diaphragm is the key to your confidence.

So we’ve got two lessons. We’ve got the power of practice. We’ve got the importance of the diaphragm.

There is a third lesson which is the big one. The one that really makes a difference. And I started to think about this lesson a couple of weeks ago actually, because someone I worked with wrote to me, she wrote an email and she said, she'd been through the worst possible thing that you can imagine happening to someone. She had just got married and was on honeymoon when her husband had a heart attack and died. And she had to go back to the church they got married in and speak a eulogy for this man. In fact, she also read a poem that she had written when they first met. And she said, *"On the worse day of my life I had to put myself together. I had to find the energy of celebration for this man who I really loved. And the only way to do it was what you taught me. The skills of breathing low and slow, taking my time, getting the control, finding the inner confidence. It was the greatest gift that I could give him"*.

And there are moments in our lives where we have to speak not because we have something to say for us, but because we want to speak for someone else: A wedding, a eulogy. And I would suggest that in those moments these skills matter more than ever. What you need to know in those moments is in this drawer: It's breath. It's air. Why air matters? It's because we breathe our thoughts. All speech is our breath. All song is our breath. And all in breath is thought. Just put a hand back on that diaphragm for a moment and breathe out. Then feel the breath in and as you breathe in think of someone you really love. That if we were all to speak on that out breath, it would be full of love.

Now breathe in again and breathe in a feeling of excitement for the day that is going to come, because it's going to be so good. And if we were to breathe in and then speak on that feeling, then we would have excitement in our voices. So you can control your voice with the idea that breath is thought. And it's in Latin, the two worlds — ancient and modern, the Romans understood this: *inspiration and respiration have the same root*. The Romans understood that we breath our thoughts. Because we speak on the out breath all you have to think about is the in-breath. You know



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the simplest way to think about the in-breath is to close your mouth. So who would have thought that the big secret I promised you was that if you want confidence in speech, all you have to do is to know when to shut your mouth.

Thank you.

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