

Ep #3: Taking a Stand



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With Your Host

Michelle Barry Franco

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Welcome to *Beyond Applause*, a podcast for mission-driven leaders, coaches, and creatives who are ready to share their expertise and stories through public speaking. Here's your host, Michelle Barry Franco.

Hello speaker friends. I am so looking forward to today's topic because frankly, this is the missing piece for so many people who come to me who want to get on more stages, who are trying to get more speaking opportunities, and frankly, are perplexed as to why it's not happening.

Often times, these are experienced speakers who, one would think a meeting professional or event professional would be excited to get on their stages, but the problem is they're missing this sort of one foundational element in their speaking and thought leadership. So I want to talk about that with you today.

We are going to talk about taking your stand. And by this, I mean your crystal clear, I'm-like-Oprah-in-what-I-know-for-sure stand. And I can't wait to share this with you because it really can change everything in your speaking and in your thought leadership, and therefore your ability to make an impact with your message.

This week, I'm excited to weave in this new element to our podcast called A Story of Inspiration. And I'm loving this idea of sharing a quick story of inspiration before we dive into content each week because I feel like it will just sort of like - it sets the context for why all of this matters. But all of these little things happen throughout the week as I go about the week, as I read stories, as I have experiences, and I think, "Man, I should talk about that."

So here we are. So this week, I was inspired to start the Story of Inspiration by watching my daughter Annika, and really the whole cast of Annie, in our community rendition of the delightful play, Annie, over the weekend. And as I was watching this show, I watched it actually three times, which was not what I planned, and I'll tell you about that in a minute. But I watched it three times and each time just found more and more delight in it, but I also was

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very much watching the actors in the show and ways that they handled difficult circumstances.

The thing is I don't know much about theatre. Sometimes people think that those of us in the speaking world and those of us in the theatre world have a lot of crossover. And while I do know a number of people who come from theatre and are now speaking, I actually find the two to be very different, and I think if you ask them, many of them will say the same.

Yes, there's the element of standing in the spotlight in front of a bunch of people, there's that whole like, you know, you have to get over that stage fright kind of thing, so there is a considerable amount of crossover in that way, but really, here's the largest distinction. In theatre, you're acting as someone else. In great speaking, I would argue you are being the most sort of courageous, bold version of yourself.

So that really does take a different kind of vulnerability. I'm not putting one over the other as far as vulnerability. And in fact, this story that, you know, inspired me to talk about this is about that kind of vulnerability because I watched on that stage, one of the lead characters multiple times forget his lines. And a few times, we probably didn't know about it. Most people probably didn't know about it. The only reason I knew is because I had seen the show before just the night before, and I remembered that it was supposed to go a little differently right there.

But it really wasn't a big deal, right? And he stayed with it. I mean, that was the thing that was so amazing and remarkable. Because that can be really disconcerting, right? When you sort of forget your lines or you know you messed up and you have this whole internal experience. And he handled it so beautifully and it was such a lesson around just staying in service.

And this got even more amplified as it got toward the end, and it was clear he forgot his lines. Like, he couldn't remember a part to the song and he had to just sort of like, reach for it. And you could see him doing that in his mind. But he stayed with it. And he found a spot and he joined in, he delivered an awesome rest of the play and I had an amazing experience.

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So much so that we had only bought tickets for two shows, and we ended up buying tickets for three to bring our other daughter again who also loved it so much.

So it's just such a story of inspiration around, you know, it really isn't about us and about us being perfect. And even though I know this is theatre and I just did this whole thing about theatre and speaking not being the same, in many ways, it is very much about being of service to the audience, right? That is another place where crossover was very powerfully, and he stayed in beautiful service to the audience, and that's what we need to do too. No matter what happens. Anything can happen. It's all in how we handle it.

So that's the story of inspiration for this week. Now, let's dive into the content. We are going to talk about, as I said, taking your stand. One of my favorite clients - and if you're a client and you're listening, you are very likely a favorite too, so just because this isn't your story doesn't mean you're not a favorite.

But one of my favorite clients has been speaking for a long time. She gets on some pretty cool stages, and largely because she's a successful founder of a company and her story is very inspirational for other women, other just entrepreneurs and founders overall who want to start businesses.

So it is a natural speaking attractor. Many of my clients who have founded successful companies do get sought out to be speakers if they have been out there enough, you know, sharing this story about their company. But she wanted to get on different kinds of stages. So she was being naturally invited on to some very cool stages, but she had a few conferences in mind that were really her dream conferences, and she wants to be on those stages and other ones like them.

Yet, she was finding it difficult to get on these stages, and that was really not because she wasn't a great speaker or didn't have evidence of her great speaking. It was because it wasn't clear what the stand is that she takes in the world. It wasn't clear what her message was, and when it's not clear the stand you take, then it's not clear how you change people's lives.

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And when you are coming in to step onto one of those bigger stages, there is an expectation not only that you are a great speaker, but that you will change things for the people in that audience. So this is what I want you to have after our time here together. I want you to have crystal clarity about the stand that you take.

And in service of that, we're going to talk about what do I even mean by your stand. We're going to get clear on that and I'm going to share with you a favorite exercise that I do with clients that will help you get really clear on your message. And then what does it mean to have a stand that matters? How do you even know what matters? We're going to talk about that and then finally, how do you make it clear that you take this stand? So what do you need to be doing, what needs to be out there in the world or what do you need to be sharing so that it's clear that you're the person to bring in to the event to share this stand.

So first let's talk about taking your stand. Like, what is your stand? How do you know what your stand is? So I'd like you to do a little exercise with me. Close your eyes if you're in a safe place to close your eyes, or if you need to keep your eyes open because you're driving or something, then just imagine that you're in a little town. And you're in the streets and the streets are full of people. And everybody is talking, there's chaos everywhere. There's a lot of struggle. And they're all saying to each other, "We don't know what to do, how are we going to solve this?"

And you're standing among them thinking, "Oh, I can totally help with this, this is the thing I help with." But nobody can hear you because there's chaos everywhere. So you're looking around for a way to let them know you can help, and you see this ladder and it's leaning up against a building. And you climb up that ladder and you get on to the rooftop, it goes all the way up to the rooftop, and the rooftop is relatively flat so it's safe.

And you cup your hands around your mouth and you yell, "Listen to me, beautiful people. Here's what you need to know to make your lives better." What would you say to them? And then as you imagine yourself saying this, think about who is on those streets? Who are you saying this to?

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This is what I call your rooftop message. Now, some obvious questions that might be coming up in your mind are, "Well, it depends. You know, what I say from that rooftop depends on who's on those streets," right? So how do you decide who's on those streets?

And this is really where we're dancing between sort of the first two kind of topic areas, main point areas that I said we were going to cover. First is what is your message? What is the stand you take? What do I mean by you taking a stand? And that is what is that thing you want to shout from the rooftops?

And then the second part of this is how do we know that it matters, that this stand actually matters? Who measures that? Who says that it matters? Well that, of course, depends on who's on the streets. And it's this sort of back and forth dance, right? Because you can get up on the rooftop and shout something like, "Hey everybody, if you just slept more, you'd all be way less miserable," right? Cool. I think many of us would nod our heads and agree with that.

But how much more powerful is it if you say, "Listen to me, brand new parents," and you're imagining that on those streets are those new parents. You can say a lot more empathy things like, "I know that it's so hard when your baby is waking up over and over throughout the night." Or, you know, "You're having trouble breastfeeding and so you're really uncomfortable."

Whatever the situation is for the people that you work with, I understand your particular circumstances, and if you got more sleep, you would feel so much better. I can help you sleep more. Like, that's the key, right? So if you're talking to athletes on those streets, you're going to say a different thing. You're going to say, "Listen to me, athletes, you may not realize this because I know you're putting practice and exercise and you know, all of those other like, physical performance things ahead of all else, but in fact, if you got more sleep, all of that would get elevated." Right?

So the stand that you take is the first thing you need to get really clear. But the second part is what determines how you know it matters, and that is for

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whom are you taking this stand. And when you have clarity on both of those things and you express that powerfully with meeting organizers, then those meeting professionals, I should say, are much clearer on when it is right to bring you on to their stages. But you've got to have that clarity first.

So let's be clear. A topic area is not a stand. And that is usually as far as many of the people who have come to me sort of struggling to get speaking opportunities, usually there's this confusion around a topic area, like, I am an expert in health and wellness or overall nutrition is not the same as taking a stand that matters.

So to give you concrete examples of this, think of Brene Brown for example. One of our most famous thought leaders right now. Can you think of her stand? She takes a stand for vulnerability in business. She takes a stand for vulnerability in relationships, and appropriate vulnerability, right? So that we take care of ourselves too. But she talks a lot about how when we are vulnerable, we get more of what we want.

So when we're on the streets saying, "Oh, how come I'm struggling to lead my team in a way that's really powerful? Why aren't they listening to me? Or why aren't they feeling inspired?" And Brene Brown would say because you're not being vulnerable enough. You're not being appropriately vulnerable with them to create the kind of connection.

And of course, she talks about shame and other elements too that all weave in, but we do know what Brene Brown takes a stand for, and we know for whom she takes that stand. And she does have a number of audiences, right? She speaks at women's leadership conferences, I've seen her at those. I know she has many corporate clients where she speaks in - you know, for leadership in corporations.

So she's a good example of someone who has a really clear stand. Another example, Simon Sinek, who wrote the book *Start with Why*, and also has a very popular TED talk. So his whole thing is you know, until you know why you're doing something, you're not going to express it powerfully, you're not going to be as successful both in your own life and feel as

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successful, but as make as big of an impact with your work. You've got to come back to why, the why, the deep why of it.

And he tells his own personal story around that. So these are some very clear stands that matter. Now, who does Simon Sinek's stand matter to? He talks about it again, in the corporate environment often, so both in leadership but also in just sort of like, corporate overall why do you do the work that you do, in careers you can apply his stand in careers. So at different levels inside of companies.

So we don't have to be super strict about who's on the streets, but it's a powerful way for us to tighten that message and make it clear to people who are putting on these conferences, who's lives we can change and how - very specifically, how their lives will be better. They'll be able to be better leaders or say it's a parenting conference and your topic is in the realm of parenting and you're a nutritionist.

So maybe you want to get up on that rooftop and say, "Listen to me parents, I know you think your kids will only eat pasta and cheese and tortillas," which is a little bit like my experience early on in parenting before we learned about food allergies in our house. But actually, you can feed your kids super healthy food that will change their behavior and their energy throughout the day. And allow them to do better in school and enjoy their life more, right?

So parents are on the street, and yes, you're in nutrition but you have a really specific message. So a message that matters. Now, the third main point that I mentioned that we would cover is okay, then how do you make it clear out in the world that this is the stand that you take? And of course, this gets built over time. This is really the path to thought leadership, which I will talk about in greater detail. It's also in my book, *Beyond Applause*, little book plug.

But really, this is - you start to speak and write and become a guest on podcasts. You talk about this everywhere and you keep your own thought leadership focused in this way. So when someone contacts you and says,

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"I'd love to have you on my podcast, we're talking about, you know, this topic this month." You say great, if it's appropriate. If you know, that is within your expertise. If it's within nutrition for example, you say, "Great, I speak on how parents can feed their kids healthy food that the kids will actually eat."

So you let them know what you speak on. And then, of course, you have a hub, a place where people can see examples of you not only speaking and sharing your thought leadership maybe through publications, a book, whatever, but also very clearly on that topic area.

So there it is, my friends. Take a stand for something that matters. Make it crystal clear what that stand is, for whom it matters, who is served by that stand. And then create a hub, a place where you can point people and say, "Look, here's the stand I take. Not only am I a great speaker, which you can see here, but I change people's lives in this particular way, for these particular people."

I hope this has been helpful to you, I love being here with you, and I look forward to it actually next week. In the meantime, if you'd like to dive deep on this for yourself, I've created a whole get started speaking toolkit. And the beginning of that is really about how to take your stand, so it'll take you through your rooftop message question and more. And you can get that at michellebarryfranco.com/start. See you next week, friends.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Beyond Applause*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more, head on over to michellebarryfranco.com/start to get your free complete guide to stepping into leadership speaking right away.