



The Power of Voice:

a critical catalyst for social change.

By **Eric Friedenwald-Fishman** and **Maria Elena Campisteguy**

Who has the Power of Voice and who does not often determines:

- Who has access to decent housing, fair wages, healthy food, clean water and quality health care
- Who is safe, and who feels safe and able to express their views
- Who has the resources to advocate for their beliefs and rights
- Who has their perspective accurately portrayed in media
- Who votes, who influences and who makes policy
- Who has the ability to make change within organizations and communities

But too often, who has voice is limited in ways that hurt individuals, families and communities. Too often, those who are denied voice are the same people who are closest to the challenges we need to solve and are on the front lines experiencing the impacts. Too often, voice denied not only perpetuates disparity, but also stifles innovation and limits the ideas, perspectives and solutions that can be considered.

As social entrepreneurs and socially responsible business leaders, we can and must change this.

We have the privilege, platform and power to use our voices to create a more just and sustainable world—and the opportunity to amplify the voices of other Change Agents.

After more than a quarter of a century working in the field of social marketing and communication for social impact, we have learned two key lessons that we want to share:

Change Agents Matter.

and

Voice Matters.

In 1988, the governor of Oregon signed an executive order banning discrimination based upon sexual orientation by the state government. This order did not add the rights of public accommodation, or marriage, or workplace protection in the private sector. It did make it illegal for the state to treat employees differently. Immediately, a right wing group, the Oregon Citizen's Alliance, filed an initiative to overturn this executive order. In their campaign, they used fear of the 'other' and the most egregious of stereotypes. Here is Eric's personal chronicle about this issue:

I was right out of college, in my first real job (doing corporate PR for a subsidiary of a large corporation), and I attended a lunch meeting being held to fight this



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discriminatory ballot measure. Back at the office, I urged our company to publicly advocate for the defeat of this measure. We did not. I was told we had diverse customers and many could be offended by our being seen as not supporting traditional values.

As an individual, I volunteered and tried to drum up support. I could not get the Chamber of Commerce to stand up, and had a very hard time getting businesses large and small (outside of the very progressive community) to donate, buy tables at a lunch, etc. To a great degree, the voice of business was absent from this fight.

The measure passed, which was a sad day for Oregon. But fast forward to today, and in the course of numerous fights on this issue, the business community, faith community and others have found their voice and their ability to amplify it, as well as the voices of others.

The business community signed up for the fair workplace project. Long before employment law changed, more than half the employees in my state worked for companies that had changed their policies to include sexual orientation as a protected class—and they were telling this story publicly.

The business community then came out publicly in support of laws ensuring equal protection and gay marriage. And even as recently as this year, the CEO of Apple came out in public support because he felt the need to use the power and platform of his position to help create change.

The in-flight magazine on one of my recent flights had a wedding planning feature and the first photo showed the beautiful Hawaiian wedding of two men. No special caption, no call out, just a standard part of how we now tell the story and market the marriage industrial complex in America.

I tell this story because it is a powerful example of how the Power of Voice (both when it is used and when it is not used) can have a huge impact. It's also an

illustration of the potential for cultural change as a result of voice that we have seen over the past 27 years. While there is still a very long road ahead on this issue, we have seen a major shift in cultural expectations that came as a result of voice. This truly impacts our lives and our workplaces. Increasingly, people can show up as their full selves and make their full contributions, as fear and discrimination on this front are replaced with appreciation, respect and rights.

Change Agents Matter.

Nothing changes without leaders who see that change needs to occur and who take action to drive that change. These leaders are both formal (with the title and designated power of CEO, Founder, elected or appointed official, etc.) and informal (community leaders, line staff, customers, artists, etc.). We call all of these leaders, in the aggregate, Change Agents.

Change Agents see a need ranging from injustice to inefficiency, and they see what does not work in the status quo. They see fundamental flaws and unrealized opportunities—from food and play “deserts” (neighborhoods without parks or available fresh food) and unacceptable gaps in school achievement, to opportunities for clean energy sources that create good jobs and community-based wellness models that address disparity. Change Agents see these needs. They believe that there are solutions. And they work to make change occur.

They hear the needs, wants, desires and demands of others. And, they have the gift and grit to articulate these needs and take actions that can galvanize others. Change Agents have the ability to take a creative leap—seeing possibilities and imagining solutions that move, to paraphrase Miguel Cervantes, “from seeing life as it is to seeing life as it should be.”

Entrepreneurs and social investors, through their transformative businesses and nonprofits, manifest the core attributes of Change Agents. Here are a few examples of real-life Change Agents:

Dolores Huerta, the co-founder of United Farm Workers, who—with César Chavez—heard the needs of farmworkers. They dedicated themselves as Change Agents to empower workers and engage consumers in demanding change.

LGBTQI activists and artists in the most discriminatory countries in the world who risk their lives to support their communities, demand change and tell their stories of oppression to activate the international community. They are supported in their courageous work by the **Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice**.

Organic food pioneers like **Theresa Marquez** of Organic Valley and **Stan Amy** of New Seasons Market have joined with numerous others who bucked the dominant industry’s “conventional wisdom” to insist on more stringent natural and organic standards, labeling laws and consumers’ right to know about GMOs.

Josh Mailman and numerous other social investors see the disparity in allocation of investment capital, and make it available to companies that serve the developing world and companies created by young and diverse entrepreneurs. They invest in companies that also have the potential to be agents of change.

And **Gifford and Libba Pinchot** who saw that the very way MBA programs mint the business leaders of the future was flawed—by perpetuating single bottom line thinking. As Change Agents, they created Bainbridge Graduate Institute (now Pinchot University)—which, for over a decade, has trained and graduated business leaders who get great jobs, lead great companies and bring values and sustainability to the table as part of their DNA. They have influenced the entire field of professional business education.

The list of Change Agents could go on and on—from leaders of social movements to founders of innovative companies. Change Agents matter.

And inviting others who are blocked from being the Change Agents our society needs matters, too. While there are many examples of extraordinary people who, despite massive disparity and structural challenges, are powerful Change Agents, it is also true that those who have grown up with privilege have easier access, ready platforms and often more societal permission to act as Change Agents.

Our first invitation to you is to **be a Change Agent talent scout**—to purposefully consider how the structure of your organization, your workplace policies, your supply chain engagement and your customer and community relationships can better foster Change Agents.

Think just about your workplace and your human resources approaches: how you recruit and how you retain excellent workers, how you recognize and reward people, how you provide opportunities for each employee to contribute, to advance and to access professional development opportunities and training in ways that work for them. How each person in your organization is supported with what they need to become a full contributor can impact who is able to be an effective Change Agent.

But as much as Change Agents matter, **they cannot have an impact if they do not inspire others**. They do not have the power to make change by themselves. They need to engage, connect and drive others to action. They need the **Power of Voice**.

Voice Matters.

The Power of Voice is one of the core tools Change Agents use to drive action. It is key to raising awareness, informing and educating others that there is a problem to be solved or an opportunity to be seized. It is how Change Agents inspire others to get involved, and to help them see that change is needed and possible. It is an important point of leverage to influence influencers to make change. And the Power of Voice is used in its many forms (stories, testimonials, direct engagement,

demonstrations, media content, advertising, boycotts and, yes, even campaign contributions) as the lingua franca of advocacy.

Whether you want to pass a measure by ballot, by the city council, the county commission, the state legislature or Congress, whether you want to influence corporate action through a proxy vote, the threat of a proxy vote, investment or divestment, whether you want to change the rules of the playing field—from energy portfolio requirements to food labeling requirements—the Power of Voice rules the day.

While this is true in every sector, the business community wields the Power of Voice in ways that have extraordinary influence. To see this in action, let's take a look at some areas where that influence is not used for a just and sustainable world.

Advocate for a minimum wage that is a living wage, and you will hear loud and clear how that will hurt working people and raise prices on everything from pizza to nursing home care.

Seek to require renewable energy standards, and you will hear about how these requirements will kill jobs; you'll hear about the virtues of clean coal, and how working Americans will not be able to afford heat for their homes.

Advocate for background checks or restrictions on the sale of automatic weapons or armor-piercing ammunition, and you will be deluged with messages about public safety and the sanctity of individual freedom.

And we hear these powerful voices via millions of dollars of advertising, PR, think tank-funded research and grassroots-sounding voices “of the people”—through industry funded coalitions.

And yet, business can also use the Power of Voice and can do so in authentic ways for economic equity, environmental health, human health and

many other good causes—as well as for policies and community expectations that level the playing field for responsible products and companies.

Which businesses use voice is not just an issue of the number of zeros in the bank accounts of companies that rely on the status quo—companies that have great stakes in carbon emitting technologies or the empty calories enshrined in the Farm Bill. It is also an issue of their willingness to use voice. Many of us use our voices to drive positive change—and many of us do not to the extent we can.

We often hear from values-driven business leaders that they do not want to “mix in politics,” “abuse their power” or “play the game that they see as being corrupt.” Our point is to not see this as a zero sum game. We can use our voices and amplify the voices of others in authentic ways. We can play the game with our values intact, and by our own rules. We can say yes to telling our story and no to ceding the field. Let's explore some of the ways we can advance our businesses, our values and the vision of the Change Agents we support.

In essence, there are two actions we can all take—which is our second invitation to you: **Use our own voice** and **amplify the voices of other Change Agents**.

Use our own voice.

As leaders with the power and platforms to carry our voices, we can and should use voice directly. Here are five tips on ways that you can, too.

1. Educate and advocate for causes and issues via your company and products communication channels. Look at how Stonyfield has used its yogurt tops to educate people about causes, from green power and smaller cars to conserving farmland. And how Clif Bar's LUNA bar brand promotes the fight against the environmental causes of breast cancer. Your public relations outreach (through media, social media, speaking engagements and official

statements) is another powerful form of voice. For example, companies like Salesforce, Accenture, Apple, Lilly and hundreds of others threatened to pull their business from Indiana within one day of Governor Pence agreeing to sign a law that legalized discrimination ... and the Governor backed down.

2. Bake advancing voice into your products and company. Take down a recipe from Beneficial State Bank—whose core business provides access to capital for sustainable companies and sustainable development (which they define as advancing both environmental health and economic equity). Look at Recycleforce, who helps formerly incarcerated individuals successfully transition back into civil society with jobs and training, while keeping waste out of the landfill. Or look at former NBA basketball player Will Allen, who has made a business of providing equal access to healthy, safe and affordable food: after a successful career as a pro, he returned to his farming roots and began Growing Power. These companies, and many others like them, tell the story of a more just and sustainable world as part of their core value proposition.

3. Play the game—get involved in electing good people and advancing good policy. From serving on a steering committee or raising money for a candidate or an issues campaign to making calls yourself and directly advocating with policy makers, using your voice makes a difference. This is particularly true when business is seen as being a monolithic voice—but the voice of business people advocating a different point of view carries an even greater power. You can see the power of being an unusual suspect—from passage of the Community Reinvestment Act in the early 1970s, when ShoreBank was the only banker advocating for it, to more recent battles for GMO labeling when companies like Dr. Bronners and New Seasons Market bucked larger industry giants by campaigning for it. Or look to the numerous certified B Corps (companies that meet the highest standards of

environmental and social responsibility), from Patagonia to Equilibrium Capital—who have helped pass laws in 27 states to create a new corporate form that requires a fair return to diverse stakeholders, including shareholders, rather than just maximizing returns to shareholders.

4. Vote with your dollars—where we use our purchasing power and how vocal we are with our buying choices is another form of voice. We can specify the use of 100% post consumer waste paper produced by firms like New Leaf Paper, and ask suppliers to take the Quick Impact Assessment that illuminates their environmental, governance, workplace and community commitments. We can include Social K in our retirement plans, giving employees the ability to invest with their values. How we vote and give voice with our dollars sends a signal to the marketplace and inspires others.

5. Use your personal platform and the spotlight your company has created to illuminate issues and causes. Ben Cohen, co-founder of Ben and Jerry's, has significantly raised awareness of the egregious levels of defense spending compared with all other needs. More recently, he has applied his voice (and the voice of anyone able to use a self-inking stamp) to Stamp Out Money in Politics. Danny Kennedy, the founder of Sungevity, has championed an energy future without fossil fuels with his book about, and advocacy for, a Rooftop Revolution. Apple CEO Tim Cook decided to come out publicly, knowing that by virtue of his position, the message of equal rights and the right to a life lived free from fear and full of potential would make front page and primetime news all over the world. Or look at Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz, who has been undaunted by criticism and boycotts—some from his own shareholders—for exercising the Power of Voice and his corporate platform to speak out on race relations and in support of gay marriage. As leaders, we have powerful platforms that should not lay dormant when we can leverage them to create impact.

Every day, in these and other ways, we can use our voices to advance change. But our voices are not enough. We also must amplify the Voices of Change Agents.

Amplify the Voices of Change Agents.

As leaders with power and privilege, we have great access—and frankly, we have the ability to readily use our Power of Voice. We can and should also create platforms that amplify the voices of others, particularly those who do not have as much access or equitable opportunities for their voices to be heard. At its core, the disparity of who has voice and who doesn't is really about inequity. Built into our system are significant interrelated disparities of income, education, health and opportunity.

As we know all too well, our zip code, skin color, immigration status, gender identity or other factors can have far more to do with whether we have voice than our ideas or talents. We all know this. Some of us have benefited from the privilege with which we walk into every situation. Some of us have overcome significant obstacles and decks stacked against us in order to succeed. We can all be advocates for equity. Not only for opportunities and basic inclusion but rather as committed champions for the full inclusion and engagement that invites everyone's full contribution, voice and leadership. We can make sure the voices of our employees, suppliers, customers and communities are heard. We can do this by championing policies and practices that create a truly level playing field, and by supporting the voices of champions for equity.

Here are three ways to help amplify the voices of others.

1. Structure your organization to amplify the voices within it. How the people inside our organizations have voice matters. Do we have structures that seek out the best ideas? Do we have hiring processes that truly bring in a diverse workforce, or do our networks perpetuate staffing

that does not reflect our communities? Do we encourage our team members in doing community work with support for volunteer time, matching contributions and sponsorships? Do we design our retention, training, professional development and promotion programs to understand and value cultural context and to create equitable opportunities?

All of these are ways our companies can amplify the voices within them to improve our own performance, increase the power of our teams' voices and get involved in the issues people care about within our organizations.

For example, Eric Ries and Lean Startup, have helped bust the myth that “there just aren't diverse qualified tech applicants” by bringing the concept of blind auditions that transformed symphonies to the tech world—resulting in significantly more diverse candidate pools. Or look at Greyston Bakery, whose open hiring approach—giving a job to whomever shows up first, with no questions asked about their past. Greyston provides the Power of Voice, and the empowerment that comes with having a job, to workers who often do not get the chance to even make a case for themselves as employees due to their background, their situation or their past. By creating a structure that values the work a person does today, Greyston creates both employment and a platform for many who are denied voice. It helps people advance and contribute their voices to the workplace and to their communities.

2. Open your channels to amplify the voices of Change Agents. Inviting Change Agents to use the platforms of your advertising, social media, product tags, retail displays, online advocacy tools and numerous other communication channels directly supports other voices, and highlights perspectives that are less likely to be heard. For example, Indigenous Designs amplifies the voices of makers and artisans in the developing world through its online videos and product tags, and across its

product marketing. Credo serves as a platform for its customers' voices and the voice of social causes. Credo promotes the voices of Change Agents and of advocates for issues and causes through its spectrum of customer communication tools (billing, social media, online and others). The company amplifies the advocacy voices of its customers with invitations and easy tools for direct action through its campaigns.

3. Invest in Change Agents. Many Change Agents have powerful voices, but still need help getting their voices heard. There are many ways to invest in Change Agents: making donations to organizations that advance issues you care about, investing in companies with prospects for great impact, opening doors and creating opportunities through introductions, endorsements and invitations.

Every leader who makes a contribution to an organization like Center for Community Change, National Immigration Forum, the Sierra Club, Tides Foundation or numerous others helps fund a Change Agent's perspectives and issues. Every leader who invests in new and visionary leaders by creating meaningful internships and paying interns a living wage that provides opportunity to all candidates—not just those who can afford it—opens doors and clears paths for impact. Every leader who takes the time to meet with, mentor and make heartfelt introductions for Change Agents expands their networks and the reach of their voices. Every leader who invests in emerging entrepreneurs—as do Serious Change Investments, Renewal Funds and numerous other impact investors—amplifies the voices of these Change Agents and helps them build platforms from which they can amplify the voices of others.

Changing lives. Changing the world.

Advancing the Power of Voice is all about changing lives and changing the world. Let's remember to be purposeful about being Change Agents and supporting Change Agents. Let's remember to use

the Power of our Voice, and help others amplify their voices, too. Because Change Agents with the Power of Voice change lives and change the world.

Maria Elena attributes three people with helping her find her Power of Voice:

I came to this country when I was 8 years old. The plastic sign that dangled from my neck was stamped "unaccompanied minor." I spoke enough English to be confused. Why did it say I was unaccompanied? I was bringing along my 7-year-old brother and my sister, who was 5. I remember my father standing in the darkness, waving from the platform as I pressed my nose against the window of the Pan Am jet. We left everything we knew and almost everyone we loved behind, in order to join my mother in the United States.

My mother's dream was that we would receive an education. Every night at the dinner table she talked about injustices taking place in the world, and how important it was to be aware of what was happening and to stand up for change. We talked about things like dictatorships, genocide, apartheid and religious wars.

My mother has Alzheimer's now. I pray that she does not ever forget how much of a Change Agent she was in my life, and the lives of so many others.

I was accepted at Georgetown University, but didn't know how I could possibly pay for school. I received an all-expenses-paid invitation to visit, and I accepted, just to see what college looked like. I was fascinated by the smart conversations I heard around me, and being in Washington, D.C., made me feel like I was a part of creating history. During my tour on Saturday morning, I saw a sign on a building that said Financial Aid. I slipped away from the group and walked inside, determined to see if I could find assistance to be able to attend this amazing school. There was only one man working at a remote desk. With tears in my eyes, I explained that I really wanted to come to Georgetown but did not have the resources to pay for it. He asked

me two things: my name and how much I might need. I received a scholarship letter two weeks later.

The first thing I did when I got to Georgetown the next fall was to run to that office to say thank you. All I knew was that the sign on the door had said Dean Black. At the time I thought Dean was his first name, but of course it wasn't. I was told that the Dean no longer worked there. I've never been able to thank Dean Black. He was a Change Agent who helped me become the first college graduate in my family.

In 1987, I heard about a group of business people who had started a women's mentorship program. I took a chance and submitted a resumé, hoping to find a mentor. I was selected by the senior vice president of NW Natural Gas. Once a week for a year, his assistant would meet me at the elevator and walk me to his office, where he would move the piles from his desk and focus all his attention on me, often telling me about situations he was addressing and asking for my opinion.

One year turned into nearly 30 years. I just had the privilege of celebrating my mentor's 80th birthday with him. Paul Hathaway, Sr. is a Change Agent. And all he asked of me 30 years ago, in our first meeting, was that I commit to mentoring others. I have taken that commitment very seriously. Mentoring young people, early career professionals and emerging leaders is one of my personal passions.

I dedicate my work every day to the Change Agents in my life.

Change Agents matter—and the Power of Voice is priceless.

Use yours well.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Eric Friedenwald-Fishman is a pioneer of social change marketing, lead author of the Public Will Building framework and co-author of the book *Marketing That Matters*.



Maria Elena Campisteguy is an innovator in multicultural engagement and author of “Relevance, Relationship and Results: Principles of Multicultural Communication,” and numerous other articles.

Eric and Maria Elena are both principals at Metropolitan Group.

ABOUT MG

Metropolitan Group is a full-service social change agency that crafts and integrates strategic and creative services. Through strategic communication, multicultural engagement, organizational development and resource development, we help our clients build a just and sustainable world. Metropolitan Group has offices in Chicago, Portland, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. We are proud to be a certified B Corp—recognized in 2015 as one of 100 companies worldwide with the most social impact.

More information, other articles, tips and tools are available at metgroup.com.