



Radiantly You – Episode 66

Step into Your Moxie with Alexia Vernon

{radiantriverwellness.com/66-empowerment-moxie-alexia-vernon}

SUSIE: Hello radiant souls. Welcome to another episode of Radiantly You, a half hour of talk radio that's all about raising vibes and creating magic in your life. Every week, I invite inspirational guests to share their wisdom and strategies to help move you more deeply into and through your journey of healing and awakening your creative power, your inner strength, intuition and spiritual energy. And on today's show, I'm bringing on a very powerful and transformative guest to deep dive into an area where so much healing is needed, especially for women and especially in today's environment. The focus of our conversation is communication and to just set the stage real quickly.

How effectively and how compassionately we are able to express ourselves through that vibratory quality of our words and presence, that really reflects how well we'll be able to expand our consciousness and show up as a healing presence in the world. Whether that's for your family or for your job or even in community leadership. So whether it's the first cry when we're born or whether it's the communication and the DNA-encoded messages in our bodies, or a presentation or a speech an email or phone call, or speaking up for social justice - humanity is connected by a consciousness. This one consciousness and our communication is like a fabric that weaves it all together. Communicating is connecting and our words can heal just as easily as they can divide. They reveal our inner world and can elevate us as individuals or keep us small and limited and afraid. And the work that we put into our voice and expression has the ability to open doorways to higher levels of consciousness healing and self-transformation.

And I found that in this area, especially in my case, this is an area where a coach or a guide can be really helpful because our ability to communicate effectively doesn't always come naturally or easily. So stay tuned because on this episode, that's exactly what you'll get - some guidance and coaching from the women's empowerment and speaking coach who was branded the Moxie Maven by Obama's White House Office of Public Engagement. She's going to share stories, lessons and actionable advice and strategies to help you communicate with authenticity and clarity and compassion.

Before I introduce today's featured guest, I just want to make sure you know where to find the show notes transcripts and recordings of all Radiantly You Radio episodes. They're on my website at radiantriverwellness.com.

So without further ado, let's bring on today's guest. Alexia Vernon is a sought-after speaker, speaking coach and women's leadership consultant and trainer. She is funny. She's smart and she is so full of heart. And while her impressive list of speaking engagements at the United Nations on national TV and cable networks might make you think she was just born with the gift of perfect speaking skills, today she'll share that it's been a journey. From headgear and hairy legs to overcoming defeating self-talk and really cultivating that mindset of successful communication.

Lex recently released her new book. It's called **Step into Your Moxie: Amplify Your voice and Visibility in the World**. It's filled with funny and vulnerable stories and also has a lot of exercises and actions in each and every chapter that can help women have that daring conversation or give that really important presentation or to tell people to respect their boundaries and, my favorite, run for office. So this is going to be my show where I'm going to say if you're a woman and you've been thinking about it, you know, get your communication skills in order and go for it.

All right, welcome Lex. Thank you so much for sharing your time energy and wisdom with us today.

ALEXIA: [04:51] Thank you so much for having me Susie and I've got to say what an awesome, awesome contextualizing of why this work matters so deeply in the world. I want to go back and listen to it again and again.

SUSIE: Thank you. Thank you. It's an area that I've had to do a lot of my own personal work on and there were so many times I was reading the book and I was like, oh my gosh, is she talking about me? Really? I was like, oh man, she's describing me there. So I love that you've given your book such a playful title: Step into Your Moxie, and then you even have these Moxie Moment exercises in each chapter. I'm curious, you know, what was your intention in using the word moxie to frame this idea of amplifying the voice visibility and influence for women?

ALEXIA: [05:38] I love the word moxie for so many reasons. At the top of the list because it suggests playfulness, which as you identified, is very much my authentic voice. And when I talk about stepping into your moxie, I mean, it's the ability to possess the mindset and the behaviors to walk into any room or onto any stage and unapologetically speak up for yourself, for others, for the ideas and issues that matter most to you and know that when you call people to take action they will. And there are lots of different ways, potentially, to reference that idea. But to me moxie was simply the best word to be able to do it, that felt most like me.

SUSIE: I love it. I feel like words have energy to them also and that one I just, I just love it. It sort of activates a little something in me.

ALEXIA: [06:32] Yes, that's how it is for me as well. And I've heard, for a lot of people who have encountered the book or who worked with me through the years - I wish I could say it was my word - but there's something about it. Whether or not you know, the Moxie Soda origin story,

which is sort of ridiculous. This Dr. Augustine Thompson created this concoction and said if you drink it it would endow you with rugged individualism, which of course it was full of sugar. Maybe it might give you that burst of invincibility before the sugar crash. Yeah, but it's had this really unique background prior to being a word. We associate with simply confidence, owning your voice, and so forth.

SUSIE: That's awesome. You quoted Amy Poehler in the book, and I hope I said her name correctly, and it's something along the lines - I really like this quote - it's something along the lines about how long it takes a woman to unlearn what she's been taught to be sorry for and that it takes years for a woman to find her voice. And I'm curious, why is it such a challenge for women who who have so much to give to be able to speak up effectively?

ALEXIA: [07:43] And I appreciate you saying that for women who have so much to give because from having done this work with a lot of different women across industries and sectors, what I can tell you without a shadow of a doubt is that irrespective of a woman's privilege due to race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, country of origin, anything else, so many of the same concerns and difficulties emerge. And again, whether she is an executive of an organization - I witnessed this - or somebody who's fresh out of college and entering the workforce, and of course for everyone in between. And my answer to that question of 'why'... a few things.

One, when we think about how we are socialized from the time we are knee-high - and as a mom of a girl who was four and a half I see this painfully every single day - unconsciously, we are constantly sending to young women, and ultimately to older women, the message that it's important to be liked, to be kind, to wait your turn, to be beautiful, to not be too much. And while we might philosophically say we're working on that as a society, we are sending the message that girls belong in STEAM, that their voice matters, when I go out with some of my friends who have boys, the first thing that a little boy will be told by someone else is 'you look smart' or 'look how creative you are.' Versus a young lady could be doing the exact same thing and the first comment is always going to be 'wow, your eyes are big' or 'look at that killer smile.' And that starts a chain reaction of stuff. As we grow up and we start to identify our value with how we look or how we make people feel as women versus the impact of our ideas and what we can do in the world, which is the legacy boys get as they move into manhood.

And of course when we look in the workplace at things like negotiation, where it's one thing to say men negotiate more than women, so we simply need more women to stand in their value and own their financial worth. Yet, unfortunately, and I've learned this the hard way from having clients, where we would work on their negotiation strategy or setting the rates or whatever it is. They would get a different response if they did the exact same thing that a male counterpart did many times, because they were seen as entitled or aggressive rather than as standing in their value like a male counterpart might have.

So it's tricky because, as I acknowledge my book, there are lots of things fortunately we can do to reclaim the role of protagonist in the story we're creating about who we can be and how we

can use our voice and, unfortunately, we have to also recognize that there's a lot that's going on institutionally, societally that simultaneously needs to be addressed.

SUSIE: One of the exercises actually in the book is actually helping women identify the stories - and this may be stories that women also create, we kind of play into it too - the stories that women have created that create what you call a glass ceiling for their moxie, and I'm kind of wondering, you know, how do we identify those stories? And how do we shatter those glass ceilings?

ALEXIA: [11:11] If you think about the story you default to on a moment-to-moment basis whenever you think about going after something that's important to you. Now, this could be big professionally. This could be speaking your truth to a loved one or to somebody that you have a professional relationship with. For me, as I share in the book, one of those stories that I would default to constantly was a story of the first time I gave a speech when I was in third or fourth grade and it didn't go the way that I intended. It was shortly after getting what I like to refer to as my post-apocalyptic makeover. Meaning...

SUSIE: I love this story. I know what you're about to tell because I read it. I love this.

ALEXIA: [11:52] Yeah. I got a tongue thrust corrector, a jaw realigner, braces, headgear, and I had to give a speech during this time and I felt wildly uncomfortable. That showed up in how I communicated or how I didn't. I froze. I finally got some words out, got more drool out than words. Kids laughed at me and as a result, even when I had launched my career as a professional speaker, even when I was supporting other speakers, I would default to going into that story, and as a result often times, I would look as if I was apologizing when I was on stage. I was scared to take up space, to hold silence, to not hide behind fancy slide decks and other people's research. It took recognizing, 'oh...in the back of my mind is that little girl who wasn't enough when she was on stage.' And one of the processes I go through in the book is giving people some tools to be able to first, recall some of the stories you might be carrying around with you. Give yourself time and space to next actually relive them and then see if there's a way to reframe them so that that story goes from being something that happened to you to something that happened for you. For you to learn, to grow, to evolve, to recognize you're more resilient than you thought you were.

Maybe that story is meant for you to tell others to be able to transform their lives as I recognize my story was for me. Because once we reframe that story, that's when we can release it. We can let go, as Oprah would say, of the hope that things could have transpired differently. We can unhook from holding other people feel responsible for how we feel, we can forgive ourselves. And ultimately we can reapply what those lessons are and show up to future communication opportunities from a place of possibility rather than from a place of pain and struggle.

SUSIE: And as you were mentioning that idea of the reframe too, I was reminded that in your book you have the five Rs. Yeah, and this is, I want to let people know that this book - and if you're just tuning in, I'm speaking to Alexia Vernon today. She's written a book called Step into

Your Moxie and it's filled with almost coaching style exercises, and it's almost like getting a it's almost like getting her as your coach. And I know that the reframe was one of the reflections, like, what were the other ones that you use to help unhook women from these maybe not so positive communication styles that we have.

ALEXIA: [14:46] So to recap, recall, relive, reframe, release. And then ultimately reapply.

SUSIE: Reapply, now what is the reapply?

ALEXIA: [14:59] It's when you carry that lesson forward into future situations.

SUSIE: Okay, perfect. So how would you take a situation where... I'll just give one of my big ones is when I am addressing a group of men. I go into a different mindset where I'm very concerned that I'm going to be viewed as being too emotive or too emotional and too feminine and I feel like I have to kind of perform almost in a different way. So what would be a really great, you know way to kind of work through that and reapply a new way.

ALEXIA: [15:37] What you're describing sounds very much like that principle of bunny vs. dragon, and I don't know if you remember this.

SUSIE: I love that one.

ALEXIA: [15:47] That many of us either have one home zone or we flip-flop between both. And what I mean by that is, when we recognize we want to be liked and we want people to accept us and include us as a part of the club, we will often not speak our true opinions. We'll say what everybody, we believe, will agree with. We will over-contextualize and say, 'I think this way but you may feel differently.' I feel sometimes we use little words like 'just,' I just want five minutes of your time rather than I need five minutes of your time so that we can discuss X Y or Z.

But then on the other side of the spectrum, which you are also alluding to Susie, sometimes we feel like we have to puff up and posture and fill space and be without emotion. Of course, when we strive to do that sometimes the emotion that comes out, even if we don't intend, feels like anger. We make communication our way or the highway. it doesn't feel like it's a collaborative, generative process of discovery between us and whomever we're speaking with.

SUSIE: I hear that, so you got the powerless, sort of more submissive bunny on the one end and the fiery dragon on the other, and then you wrote about the cheetah, right? And cheeta is kind of, that's the power you want to harness. Can you describe what that looks like?

ALEXIA: [17:15] Absolutely. And before I do I want to say one more thing about the bunny and the dragon personas. Often times people will say, well is it that we're trying to strike a middle ground between those two? And actually, the answer is no, because both are born out of that fear that our authentic voice is not enough. And so, when we look at the cheetah as a different archetype, a better archetype, its altogether different. If you think about a cheetah, one of the things that make them so freaking amazing is that they can accelerate faster than any land

mammal, up to 65 miles per hour in a matter of seconds. And when they're not accelerating, they're often holding back, they're observing what's going on. They have these big eyes that are taking it all in. And if you think about their eyes, they have what look like tear marks permanently imprinted.

SUSIE: They do.

ALEXIA: [18:23] And it's not to suggest that when we when we approach communication from a cheetah perspective we are emotional and theatrical and all over the place. But it means that we recalibrate from thinking that communication is about us, and instead we recognize communication is about the person or people we're seeking to move to action. And therefore, we have to be flexible and get it right for that person, not by contorting ourselves into who we think they want us to be, but recognizing, when is a moment where someone is ready to listen, so that we can step up, we can be assertive. And what are the moments where we are better served, if our goal is moving someone or somebody to action, to step back and ask questions and be curious and let other people do the speaking. We use our emotions when we're coming from that cheetah archetype to inform how we think, how we feel, how we believe about something. But it's a tool, it's not the end goal. And then from there, we can make a decision about not what we are entitled to say, but what do we want to say? Because again, our goal is moving people to take action.

SUSIE: That's perfect. I want to let listeners also know how they can learn more about your book. So there's a website, it's called stepintoyourmoxie.com, and you were mentioning that you have some bonuses there that people can grab, is that correct?

ALEXIA: [19:53] That is correct. We've got some fun things on that site, from a cheat sheet - it's actually more of a digital guide that takes some of the actionable strategies so that you don't have to have the book with you at all times, but you can have that sitting on your desk to refer to. There's a book club guide, in case you want to do some of these exercises with a group of women, and masterclass that you can watch on demand that is all about standing in your power and harnessing your moxie in persuasive conversations.

SUSIE: I think a book club, this would be a really fun book to do as a book club. So one of the other things that jumped out in there, in your book, that you talked about this is sort of, this idea of that inner mean girl and I'm not sure if you put it exactly like that in the book, I'm trying to remember, but lots of women have this inner mean girl that just kind of dive bombs their best efforts. Kind of that Negative Nelly like 'yeah, you don't have enough experience,' you know, 'nobody wants to hear what you're saying.' And then my favorite that you wrote in the book was 'my face looks like a drawing on an Etch-a-Sketch. Can the elevens between my eyes being photoshopped?' So, I mean, what's going on? How do we how do we work through that?

ALEXIA: [21:18] Yeah, well that particular comment, it didn't come out quite that way in real time. I like to provide protection to my clients and many have said, 'was that me?' and it's a bit of a hybrid. But one of the things that I do as a speaking coach is I work with speakers and they

come and they film their speaker reels, and as I mentioned in the book, these are amazing women: doctors, lawyers, coaches, consultants. And when they get their speaker reels of them being on a stage sharing excerpts from their keynotes, most of them don't comment and say, 'oh, I wish I had nailed that line.' It's usually, 'oh, I wish there had been more concealer,' or 'I wish I didn't wear that wrap dress because my body's folding in ways that I don't love from that side angle.'

Wow, and that is certainly the voice of the critic. I actually pull that inner mean girl stuff apart a bit. And what I mean by that is, when we're doing the mean girl thing that is absolutely, positively the voice of that inner critic, but most women have other voices that we can be carrying around with us that are equally problematic. One of those voices is the voice of the cop, and the cop are want to do, it likes to create two categories for everything that are usually at odds with one another. For example, there is the right book for me to read and then all the others are the wrong book. There's the right business for me, the wrong business and there are good people, there are bad people. And when we do that, we missed the gray underutilized space between both of those poles. And then the third voice that we can struggle with is the voice of the cheerleader. And that cheerleader, I refer to her as a frenemy, because at first she sounds like she's a BFF, a best friend. She'll say things like Lex, it's fine that you are in the middle of your book tour and you're traveling with your family and your daughter has laryngitis. It would be super cool and you could handle losing your voice and having to do speaking gig. After speaking you'll figure it out. And I'm being somewhat playful there, as you might hear that was actually based on reality of what happened a week ago.....

But the problem with the cheerleader is that yes, sometimes we do need that positive voice to get us through an objectively difficult time. But more often than not, when we default to that cheerleader voice of rah-rah, I can push harder, faster. I don't need any more resources, we get tired. We get sick. We can sometimes lash out because we don't have the reserves to more effectively manage our emotions and ultimately we burn out. So, what I know from doing this work, is that while I love to talk tactics for amplifying your communication in the world, until we are allow ourselves to talk back to that inner voice, which is different than trying to shut her down, but rather talk back to her, she is going to hold us back from having the maximum possible impact in the world.

And the way to be able to talk back to her is to introduce the voice of the coach. And what I mean by that is, the coach is curious. So she asks questions to disrupt all that cray-cray ,meaning if you've got a lot of the critic going on and she might be saying things like, 'you're not smart enough,' when you bring your inner coach in, she asks a simple arresting question. Like what's a moment where you have succeeded and how can you apply that to the situation? Or if we're in a moment where the cop is who's holding the microphone, what does the third or fourth or even a fifth option look like that I could consider before taking action. And when the cheerleader's holding the mic, that question might sound like, what can I take off my to-do list or who can I ask for help?

SUSIE: I love this because it again brings us back to just how we communicate brings up so much of our inner issues. And when we're addressing what feels like it's just communication, there's a lot more to it there, right?

ALEXIA: Absolutely.

SUSIE: One of the things in the book that you say that I really liked was that using your voice is an act of divine service to yourself and to the world. What did you mean by that?

ALEXIA: [25:49] When we know that our ideas can positively, perhaps even radically improve the lives, businesses careers, whatever it is of other people, it's not only an opportunity, it's really a responsibility to get out of our own way and speak up. Because that's us being of service, not only to ourselves, by unapologetically speaking our truth. It's also being of service to the people who can benefit from what it is that we have to say.

SUSIE: I love it. And I love that you use the word unapologetically again because... you use that a number of times

ALEXIA: [26:28] It's one of my favorite words. Normally I don't love sticking 'un' at the beginning of a word - in that case I do.

SUSIE: But it's so true, women say sorry so often and I don't know if, I very rarely have I heard men saying it ... peppered in as much as women do.

ALEXIA: [26:48] It's usually when there's a truly sorry-worthy moment where it's probably a little deferred if anything, it should have come earlier versus...and I find myself doing this. So, like, I admit in the book, I am a work in progress. I might know these things that I teach and I also have to work diligently because I, despite being the graduate of an all-girl's middle school and high school majoring in women's studies teaching women's studies, have to fight against a lot of the socialization that I experienced in the larger world.

SUSIE: Thank you so much for sharing your passion and your moxie with us today. Your book Step into Your Moxie really opened my eyes to some things that I hadn't understood, even about my own communication style, before and how I'm showing up in speaking up. So thank you very much.

ALEXIA: My pleasure. Thank you very much for inviting me and for holding space for this conversation today.

SUSIE: And that the website again to find out about the book is stepintoyourmoxie.com. And she is also on Facebook @AlexiaVernonEmpowerment and on Instagram @AlexiaVernon.

And thank you out there in radioland for tuning in. If you want to read listen to this show, head over to my website at radiantriverwellness.com where you'll find the transcript by tomorrow and while you're there check out my upcoming retreat to Budapest. It's called, Fired Up:

Awakening the Powerful Woman in Uncertain Times. Until next week, this is Susie and you've been listening to Radiantly You.