

## FOREWORD

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If you picked up this book because you think it's about voice acting and that it might help you polish your chops and pick up extra income, you're sadly correct. Because by concentrating so intensely on your personal career, you're missing 90 percent of the value of what Samantha Paris can teach you. But let's start at the beginning.

I know something about the art of voice acting. After forty years of voice-overs; ads; 150-something documentaries; two Emmys; having been the “voice” of General Motors, Tylenol, Oracle, Brita, Chiquita Banana, Mazda, Claritin, lots of other brands; and doing seven, long-form Ken Burns documentaries, perhaps my initial resistance to a “voice teacher”—even one as lovely and charismatic as Samantha Paris—might be excused as an overdose of arrogance and self-importance.

It's not that I thought that I knew it all, or had nothing to learn or to teach, when Samantha approached me to teach a class at her school, Voicetrax, but I have a particular way of working, and I just “knew” that she would never get it, because if she did, I thought it would render her and her school superfluous.

In the first place, I *never* rehearse. I never even read the copy before I enter the studio to record. I read everything in the recording studio for the first time, because I have a kind of mystical belief that the first time I read something is when it makes

the deepest impression on me, and that somehow my voice will transport that information to the listener. When I first met Ken Burns, and he entered the room carrying pads, pens, DVDs, and enormous scripts so that I could “prepare” for the National Parks series that he wanted me to narrate, he was horrified to learn that I never prepare. Startled, he blurted out, “That will never work.” Seven films later, we’re still working together.

So, when Samantha (did I mention, “quick,” “sharp,” “dazzling,” and “charming”?—and, as I soon learned, brilliant) first came to see me, I was polite, because there’s never a reason to be hurtful to others. I tried gentle dissuasion by explaining—in escalating detail—why my “method” would never work at her school. She kept smiling (did I mention “dazzling”?) and laughing and saying, “That’s what I teach.” Finally, at the edge of exasperation, I remember saying, “Samantha, I’m not about *technique*, I’m about *authenticity* and you can’t—” And she interrupted me by laughing again and saying, “That’s what I teach.” And she does.

It turned out that Samantha has a few mystical beliefs of her own. She fervently believes that the power of possibility is pre-programmed in a person’s internal life, and that he or she can be inspired to *give voice* to it. As a naturally gifted teacher, an accidental but nonetheless brilliant entrepreneur, and an indomitable force of nature (did I mention the difficulty of “Just saying ‘no’”? Think “very attractive boa constrictor”), Samantha can wring expressiveness from a stone. She inspires the best in her students, nurturing their growth and transformation in ways that so far supersede voice acting, that she should put a warning sticker on her forehead that reads, “inspirational teacher.”

Her mentorship begins with learning how to be six again, when each of us was perfect in our imperfections and completely believable in whatever we did. We’ve already transcended “voice acting” at this point, and if you’re beginning to get the idea that her idea of voice acting might help you be a better businessperson, parent,

coach, or human being, you're getting warm.

Samantha has trained more than *10,000* aspiring and working voice actors since she founded Voicetrax San Francisco in 1988. From corporate executives, realtors, and attorneys, to belly dancers, soccer moms, and police officers, Samantha's students represent all walks and status potentials of life—a Whitman's Sampler of backgrounds, professions, personalities, and vocal tones. She has made a tremendous impact on her students' lives, and, as proof, I offer the innumerable career successes and personal victories she can claim on their behalf.

But the process does not (or has not) stopped there. So many of her students go on to stay “to train” with Samantha for years—even after their careers are established, probing, going deeper, and expanding themselves in the process—that lunch at her school sometimes feels as if you've been plunged into the world's largest, warmest, Italian family. (Did I mention that her husband, Graziano, is an Italian chef who supplies the lunch, and that I had suspicions that several people in the room might have materialized just for his food?)

*Finding your voice* is such a simple idea, but, like a Japanese tea ceremony, it is far easier said than done. Questing after your *true voice* in your work and in your life can be your epic journey: learning to be who you really are—an unrepeatable expression of nature with as much integrity, power, and beauty as a hummingbird, a dolphin, a panther, or a bear—is a thrilling, captivating, elusive, frustrating, humbling, enlivening, and deeply fulfilling path to explore. The ultimate reward is coming to respect and accept yourself, which then becomes the motive force for becoming all that you might have hoped to be.

Irish author Oscar Wilde once said, “Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” For those of us who make our living in the self-expressive arts as actors, writers, entertainers, artists, and the like, that is even more true. Once we've found our true voices, our

authentic, in-the-moment truth, we have control (in the same way a kayaker utilizes the energy of a river) of the process of bringing mindfulness and authenticity to our lives and work at every turn.

Finding *your* true voice marks a turning point in life, bringing greater self-understanding, meaning, and purpose to it. When we're fortunate enough to find that true voice, we've essentially discovered the key that opens the lock to the gates that have prevented us from reaching the open ranges and plains of possibilities within us.

*Finding the Bunny* is an entertaining, edifying, and inspiring story of Samantha's life and career, set in the rather fascinating (but not widely understood) world of voice acting—a world that is, as the book's description announces, "America's most influential yet invisible art." The story peels back the curtain on the art and craft of voice acting, but if that's all you take out of it, that's akin to eating the icing and leaving the cake. The deeper, nourishment is in the cake, for anyone who feels that they've lost touch with their original energy, authenticity, and joy, and now desires to seek new paths, break old habits, and make the most of the cards they've been dealt. Learn how to enjoy the ride you've actually bought a ticket for, even if it appears to be far from what you might have envisioned for yourself.

*Finding the Bunny* is about *transformation* more than anything else—offering ideas that might challenge or freshen your thinking, enrich your life, and light your own path. Through her engaging, cleverly told tale, you'll understand the depth behind her charming phrase "finding the bunny." You'll be inspired and believe her when she espouses her deep understanding that—contrary to popular practice and opinion—*talent can be taught* and "*safety lies in the risk.*"

Her reputation preceded her, but when we finally met in person in 2016, and she invited me to speak at Voicetrax's "Inside the Voice Actor's Studio," despite my long-standing habit of warning aspiring voice actors *not* to go to school, I agreed (did I mention

“persuasive,” “charming,” and “dazzling?))” to “check it out.” I was duly impressed by what she had created and assembled and deeply moved by the remarkably warm and supportive culture and community she has created. Voicetrax is a creative haven, offering world-class training, camaraderie, and support, and, as of today, it’s the *only* school of voice acting I’ve ever encountered in which I have absolute confidence.

Read this book. It will be an eye-opener, a thought-provoker, an education, an adventure, and an inspiration. (Did I mention “more fun than a bucket of kittens”?) You might even surprise yourself and “find the bunny” in your own life.

*Peter Coyote*

Sebastopol, California

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