

Julie Eiselt, Women's March, January 20, 2018

I must admit, speaking in public terrifies me.
When I was asked to speak at today's Woman's March, I was honored...
for a quick second, and then I was panicked!

"Who am I?" I asked myself, "to speak to so many women who have their own more powerful stories to tell? Why would anyone want to hear what I have to say?"

"Who am I to speak?" I asked myself.

I am not a woman who has had to live in fear of an abuser or in fear of deportation.
I am not a woman who has struggled in a low wage job, where I was afraid to speak up about work conditions or treatment.
I haven't had the experiences that have made some women, more resilient, stronger and fierce, than I perceive myself to be.

And then I realized – that is what we, as women do.
We say, "Who am I to speak?" Or we say, "Who am I to run for political office? Who am I to lead a protest? Who am I to go for the promotion? Who am I to start my own small business or to go for the job of CEO?"
We think of all the reasons we are not quite good enough.
We think we must be more, before we qualify.
Perhaps that is a one reason that only 5% of S&P 500 companies have women as their CEOs, or that only 25% of N.C.'s General Assembly is made up of women -
even though 51% of the voters are women.

"Who am I to speak?" we ask ourselves.

Ten years ago, I could never have imagined I'd be Mayor Pro Tem.
Ten years ago, when my kids had just left home, my brother, John, suddenly died.
In the midst of profound grief, I pledged to myself that I would make the most of my life with the time I had left. I did not know what I would do or how -- but prayed that God would use me as he needed me.

Just a few months after John's death, my prayer was answered in a fearful way.
My prayer was answered in the form of a guy aiming a gun at me in an attack.
The good news is - - I am still here to talk about it.
That moment of profound fear changed my life, in a good way.
That attack led me to become an activist for criminal justice reform
which then led me to run for office.

There were two critical things that helped me win, and experience was not one of them. They were:
1. A fundamental belief that there was no good reason it shouldn't be me, and
2. I reached out for help, and some great women and men said "yes,"
because they shared my vision.

So today I ask you to think about your own goals for yourself or your community and commit to making a plan at whatever level you can,
without worrying about whether or not you know how to do it.

Rather than asking yourself "Who am I to speak?"
Ask yourself "What do I have a fire for?"
And stoke that fire.
Talk about it, reach out to others to ask for help and guidance in fueling the flames of passion that will ignite change.

Let others know what you are passionate about and you will find allies, I promise.

This morning, as you march, I ask you to do three things:

First, march with someone you do not know and ask that person,
"What do you have a fire for?"
Listen to her story and passion, encourage her to act
and tell her your story.

Second, Think about a plan for yourself for the coming year.

And third, see yourself as a change maker and say, "Why NOT me?"

It must be you. We need you – as a city and as a country.

Most importantly, be afraid, and uncomfortable.

Be vulnerable and open.

Be courageous in the face of uncertainty, for that is when progress will begin to happen.

See yourself as a change maker and say,

"Why NOT me?"

If we all did that, imagine the difference we could make.