

by
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HOW *Audio* CHANGES *Lives*

More and more listeners discover the power of audio to jump-start change.

Unless you've tried personal development programs, you may be surprised to learn how many people today are using them to learn a skill, reinvigorate a career, change an attitude, or touch something in their hearts that needs healing or renewal. Listeners are buying or renting self-help audios in record numbers. The audio segment of the publishing industry is growing faster than print, with the personal development sector leading the way in both mediums.

One reason, surely, is that in today's culture—with celebrity experts like Dr. Phil and Suze Orman and many others—we can't escape the constant drumbeat to know thyself, fix your relationships, think positively, and act wisely. The other is that people are much more likely than they were 50 years ago to change jobs several times, reinvent themselves in new careers, take up new lifestyles, and look for spirituality outside of traditional religions. Along the way, they naturally seek guidance. But why audio? How does learning by ear help?

Opening Up to Possibilities

In the early 1990s, former teacher Susanna Liller, then divorced with two children, worked in project management at a Maine shipyard. She knew she wanted a more fulfilling career but wasn't sure how to define it. She began listening to personal growth tapes—Deepak Chopra and others—on the way to work. As she absorbed their wisdom, she found the courage to leave her management job and start a mediation and facilitation practice. Today, as a partner of Barton & Gingold in Portland, she facilitates public meetings all over the country. Liller also founded a coaching division called Ruby Slippers that helps individuals devise and implement strategic life plans. She finds audio programs a great way for clients to focus on themselves and their capabilities. "There is something about having that person speaking in your ear, or in the intimacy of your car, that makes the message more real. The dimension of sound somehow gets you further than just reading the black and white on the page."

Audios can be a lifeline when someone is floundering. During a difficult time in high school, Lance Eaton found hope in the audio section of his public library: "There wasn't

a definite turning point, but I found audiobooks and then moved on to meditation and other self-development tapes," says the Boston writer who lived through years of depression as an adolescent. The benefits of listening, he remembers, were gaining new information that gave him different perspectives and "hearing another voice, a voice that was more positive than my own internal voice, which



Susanna Liller,

life coach, Portland, Maine

"When you have someone speaking to you in your car, you develop more of a relationship. I feel I've really gotten to know authors as people, whether it's Stephen King on writing or Carolyn Myss on intuition."



Dan Strutzel

publisher, Chicago, Illinois

"I think if audio programs are doing their job, there comes a point, after enough listening and re-listening, where you become your own troubleshooter."

they're talking from realized experience." In 1985, she formed her own production company, Sounds True, which today offers one of the largest catalogs available of transformational audio programs. (See Publishers Corner, page 20.)

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Another audio publishing executive who started listening at a young age is Dan Strutzel. After hearing Wayne Dyer's *How to Be an Ultimate Person* while he was at Notre Dame, Strutzel used a number of similar programs for an undergraduate retreat he conducted. "I was blown away when I discovered the material. Not only did you get the ideas, but you got the personality and power of the author in their delivery of the material . . . it was the way I learned growing up, listening to my parents and other people I respected." Though he tried a telecommunications sales job after college, the former seminarian quickly found he was better suited to work at Nightingale-Conant, the pioneer business and personal development audio publisher, where he is now a publishing vice president.

Personal Change on the Job

Some audio enthusiasts use their listening not only to motivate themselves but also to transmit energy and training ideas to their business teams. When Darlene Ryan was a retail clothing store manager, she worried that orientation

was, at that point, very negative." The audios worked well enough for Eaton to accept a relationship with a loving girlfriend and find a better social experience in college. Today, he truly enjoys his graduate work in American Studies and his promising writing career.

The right audio can activate what evangelist Robert Schuller calls "possibility thinking." Office manager Donna Sommers was a regular customer of Talking Book World in Waterford, MI, when she discovered *Romancing the Ordinary* by Sarah Ban Breathnach. The audiobook offered suggestions for simple rituals women can do to enrich their lives. One was making essential oils from scratch. After doing some research at a health food store, Sommers bought a starter kit, took it home, and started playing. Although she had no previous interest in the healing arts, she now makes herbal remedies and lotions in her kitchen and offers them to others—a passion she's considered turning into a business.

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In the 1980s, Tami Simon started recording seminars by spiritual teachers for a show she hosted at her college radio station. Finally connecting with the wisdom and hope she didn't find in the academic world, she dropped out of college to go to India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka and then moved to Boulder, Colorado, to start a similar radio program. "I thought if I interviewed wise people—spiritual teachers, visionary artists, those kinds of people—I might get some insight."

In the process Simon discovered an extraordinary gift: "The one thing that's totally natural to me is tuning into somebody through their voice and understanding where they're coming from—if I think it has genuine depth to it, if



Vicki de Arce

legal secretary, Washington, D.C.

"Spiritual tapes move me, and philosophical ones interest me. There's so much to digest and think about and enjoy!"

manuals and boring training films would fall flat with new hires who had never worked in retail before. “So I listened to Wayne Dyer on the way to work each morning. By the time I got there, I was on the hood of my car, hands on my hips, ready for the chance to share my wild message with them.” She went on to develop skits and exercises for all the store’s employees that taught them how to empathize with customers, schmooze them, keep in touch with them. She also recommended self-help audios to her customers, including one by a British author about organizing your home that went, she says, like this: “If you truly love all your bowling trophies in your basement . . . take a bloody picture of them and then throw the bloody things away!” Ryan now operates an audio bookstore in Waterford, MI, where customers hear her talk about the latest and greatest self-help titles with similar enthusiasm.

Lance Groenewold, of Dallas, TX, is responsible for a team of 7,000 network marketers. When he got started, he says, “I needed to educate myself on the industry as a whole as well as how to build a team and train this team. There is a formula we try to implement; it is 30 minutes of reading each day, 30 minutes of listening each day, and getting to a monthly event.” Audios on the company’s products make his team members less afraid to sell, less likely to procrastinate. Titles on personal development and time management are especially helpful to new salespeople, he says, people who may lack the experience to channel their energies and stay focused without guidance.

Developing people is also a top priority of consultant and library science teacher Miriam Kahn. When the audio enthusiast discovers a really good audio on motivating people or running a department, she makes it required listening for students in her library management classes. Kahn doesn’t drive anywhere without at least one or two of these programs in her car. “You really have to be organized or you don’t make a living.”

The Hope of Transformation

Factual material and step-by-step advice will always be popular with independent businesspeople—folks on the go who have to organize themselves without the structure and training available in the corporate world. But the medium of audio may work even better, some say, when it goes directly to the heart—inspiring people, giving them hope, or building an inner foundation of faith or personal value.

Dan Strutzel says inspirational audios have played a bigger part in his life than how-to audios because they offer a broad foundation of ideas. “Once I set my goals, I know what I should do. It’s really the why and keeping yourself on track every day that is more the issue. Sometimes you’re learning ideas that may not have as much relevance at the time you’re listening to them,” he says, “but they seem to take root in your soul, and they’re available for when you go through particularly challenging times.”

Tami Simon points to why audios work so well this way. “I think there’s something about audio learning that’s very sensational, intuitive, gut-feeling based,” she says. “The information goes directly through my ear into my being—not really processed intellectually in the same way visual



Tami Simon,

audio publisher, Boulder, Colorado

“Meditation used to be considered something esoteric; now people accept the idea that there are nonreligious ways to connect with an inner sense of purpose and direction.”

learning is. It’s not filtered; it gets in there whether we want it to or not.”

Because personal development programs affect people with this intensity—somewhere between that of great music and your mother’s voice—it follows that listeners will respond differently to them. Vicky de Arce is a Washington, D.C., legal secretary who listens regularly to programs by Carolyn Myss, Wayne Dyer, Deepak Chopra, and other spiritual teachers. Though raised as a Catholic, she sees herself today as a broadly spiritual person, open to ideas from many sources. Nevertheless, how people receive messages of spiritual growth is an individual, subjective matter, she says: “An audio may touch you, change you, and it may not change me—or if it does, it will change me in a different way.”

“They seem to take root in your soul, and they’re available for when you go through particularly challenging times.”

Some listeners are skeptical of consciously controlled transformation. “I’m not sure I believe in personal change as it’s presented in most self-help books,” says author and *AudioFile* contributor Benjamin Cheever. “It’s not as easy as saying ‘From now on I’m going to be brave, from now on



Lance Eaton,

writer, Boston, Massachusetts

"I was in high school when I first discovered audiobooks, and the self-development tapes I came across helped me get inside myself. Once I got to college, I really flourished."

I'm going to be kind, or even from now on I'm not going to drink,' and it's going to happen." While Cheever believes there is a mind-body connection, certain types of self-help books can make you feel worse "if you think when you get sick it's because you've given in to the wrong kind of thoughts." Eschewing personal transformation literature, Cheever is influenced instead by fiction and history, which he often engages with through audio: "I have my earphones on three, sometimes five, hours a day so I can listen to a book until I get it." He says people do change, "but we don't have much control over it."

The simple act of listening to an audio from a trusted teacher may bring inspiration into a life that wasn't there before.

Naturally, Tami Simon argues that people *can* work to change aspects of themselves that get in their way and that audio learning will help them with the process. "We have a kind of signature to our being that becomes amplified over time—essential qualities that can have wisdom aspects and neurotic aspects—we don't have to live with the neurotic aspects," she says. "I think they can be transformed into a higher expression."

Perhaps self-help audios of all kinds are popular today because we don't teach and encourage each other person-to-person as much as we used to, as much as we should. Maybe it's because too many of us don't pay sufficient attention to the opportunities for large and small actions that, like chess moves, accumulate over time to either build a life we enjoy or put us into a corner of one kind or another. Whatever the reason, the simple act of listening to an audio from a trusted teacher may bring inspiration into a life that wasn't there before and might not get there through any other means.

BOOKLIST *for Change*

THE ART OF HAPPINESS AT WORK

The Dalai Lama, read by Howard Cutler, B.D. Wong (Simon & Schuster Audio)

BEYOND BELIEF

Elaine Pagels, read by Jennifer Van Dyck (Random House Audio)

THE CASHFLOW QUADRANT

Robert T. Kiyosaki, Sharon L. Lechter, read by Richard M. Davidson (Recorded Books)

CONSCIOUS BUSINESS

Fred Kofman, read by Fred Kofman (Sounds True)

CREATING YOUR AUTHENTIC CAREER

Barbara Moses, read by Barbara Moses (Sounds True)

DON'T THROW AWAY TOMORROW

Robert H. Schuller, read by Tim Jerome (Harper Audio)

GOALS!

Brian Tracy, read by Brian Tracy (Audio Partners)

GOD HAS A DREAM

Desmond Tutu, read by Desmond Tutu (Maui Media)

THE HEALING BREATH

Neil Douglas Klotz, read by Neil Douglas Klotz (Sounds True)

LEAD THE FIELD

Earl Nightingale, read by Earl Nightingale (Simon & Schuster Audio/Nightingale-Conant)

LIFELINES

Christina Baldwin, read by Christina Baldwin (Sounds True)

LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE: THE NEW YORK CRUSADE

Billy Graham, read by Billy Graham (Penguin Audio)

MAKING A GOOD BRAIN GREAT

Daniel G. Amen, read by Marc Cashman (Books on Tape)

PEACE IS THE WAY

Deepak Chopra, read by Deepak Chopra (Random House Audio)

THE POWER OF LOVE

Laura Schlessinger, read by Laura Schlessinger (Harper Audio)

THE 7 SECRETS OF EFFECTIVE FATHERS

Ken R. Canfield, read by Wayne Shepherd (Oasis Audio)

STILLNESS SPEAKS

Eckhart Tolle, read by Eckhart Tolle (New World Library)

THE ULTIMATE ANTI-CAREER GUIDE

Rick Jarow, read by Rick Jarow (Sounds True)

THE VOICE OF KNOWLEDGE

Don Miguel Ruiz, read by Peter Coyote (Amber-Allen Publishing)

WERE IT NOT FOR GRACE

Leslie Montgomery, read by Sandra Burr (Brilliance Audio)