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VOICE LESSONS

The coaches of TV's top talent show on confidence, coping with rejection and seizing your moment



the VOICE



OF EXPERIENCE

The coaches of TV's hottest talent show share what they've learned about themselves & each other...and advice they have for all of us.

By Melinda Newman; Cover and Opening Photography by Art Streiber/NBC

When Adam Levine agreed to come aboard TV's *The Voice* as a celebrity "coach" seven seasons ago, the Maroon 5 frontman says he expected "to get a paycheck and have fun on some dumb TV show for five minutes." But he got so much more.

"It turned out to be life-altering," Levine says of serving on NBC's singing competition reality show, which airs its season seven finale tomorrow night. "After the first day of shooting,

continued on page 9

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These are your moments

THE MAN BEHIND THE VOICE

Get the scoop on John de Mol,
the creator of *The Voice*
and *Big Brother*

PARADE.COM/VOICE

from page 6

there was something that was restored in us about music. It was like a renaissance.”

Levine is one of *The Voice*'s four current celebrity coaches who compete against each other by building teams of singers. The contestants then advance—or exit—based on performance evaluations and audience votes. Three ultimately face off in a live grand finale for \$100,000 and a recording contract, while the winning coach gets bragging rights.

The rewards, though, for both coaches and “kids” (as the contestants are warmly referred to) run much deeper. Seeing these young performers deal with rejection and criticism,

Practice Makes Perfect **BLAKE SHELTON**

“Songwriting was one of the more frustrating things for me to learn how to do,” Shelton says. “A [song] publisher in Nashville told me, ‘Just keep doing it. Every day try to write a song, try to think of something, and then just one day it’s going to click.’ I just had to beat my head against the wall, every day, every night, every morning, every chance I got to sit down with that guitar to try to write a song, a melody, try to think of an idea, until I finally broke through that wall.”

Levine says, has “made me more compassionate and nicer.” And, he adds, *The Voice* gives a tremendous boost to the self esteem of everyone who steps onto its stage. “The show makes you feel good about yourself. I feel good because I’m doing this



Coaches Adam Levine, Gwen Stefani, Pharrell Williams and Blake Shelton are wrapping up season seven of *The Voice*.

thing that’s really helping people along in their careers.”

Blake Shelton, the Country Music Association’s recently crowned Male Vocalist of the Year, one of the coaches on the top-rated primetime show since it premiered in 2011, adds, “I

didn’t realize how emotionally attached I’d get. At this point, I’ve made it—if [my career] ends for me tomorrow, I couldn’t complain. My passion now is to be able to help some of these kids.” He featured season two contestant Gwen Sebastian on his recent No. 1 country hit “My Eyes,” and has given others a hand in making connections in the music

business.

Gwen Stefani, lead singer of the band No Doubt and Shelton’s fellow season seven coach, says she and “Happy” performer/producer Pharrell Williams felt immediately at home on *The Voice*’s glistening black-and-red

set on the Universal Studios lot in Los Angeles. “Everyone’s here together and we’re all moving toward this whole journey,” says Stefani (who will step down next season when one of the show’s original coaches, Christina Aguilera, returns).

Bonding with fellow performers with whom his path wouldn’t have naturally crossed is an un-

expected bonus, according to Levine. “We’re forming real friendships,” he says.

Each mentor imparts lessons that extend beyond singing critiques. “I encourage people to have an imagination and stay on the bright side of it,” Williams says. Stefani, who is a successful clothes designer as well as an artist, looks at contestants’ overall package, often compliment-

ing them on their style or even giving impromptu make-

over suggestions. “I think that’s a female perspective,” she says.

Shelton stresses authenticity. “If you want to have a long-term career, you can’t do that without being 100 percent honest with yourself. You can’t just hold up a farce or a lie for very long—people see through it,” he says.

It’s a lesson Shelton, who’s known for his quick wit and seeming willingness to say—or tweet—anything, learned him-

Deal with Rejection **GWEN STEFANI**

“Rejection, a lot of times, is fuel to something better,” Stefani says. When her band, No Doubt, was recording its 1995 breakthrough album, “Tragic Kingdom,” its record label kept saying they weren’t strong enough. Stefani used the rejection by the label and her breakup with No Doubt bassist Tony Kanal as an opportunity. “That’s when I learned how to write songs,” she says. “No one taught me how to do it. It just came out of me. That was very empowering and it basically changed the rest of my life, because I found something that I was passionate about besides just being in love with a boy. It gave me so much power.”

self after he became a coach. “*The Voice* has definitely made me more comfortable being myself,” he says. “When I first started in country music, I kind

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of felt like I really censored myself. Now with this show, it's that other side of me that people seem to relate to.

Watch, Look & Listen

PHARRELL WILLIAMS

When it comes to learning how to get better at any skill, Williams advises, "Watch yourself and then watch somebody you admire. Find interviews where they're talking. Take pictures of you standing there and a picture [of] someone else you respect and how they stand. Juxtapose those two things. Look at the body language. Do they posture themselves like you do? Who's confident? Who's not? Once you find out you're not confident, ask yourself why. Continue to be curious."



says. "The first thing I tell my team is, 'Hey, you're all going home eventually, even the winner. It's all a matter of perspective.'"

Whenever someone gets eliminated, the coaches know how it feels. "We all as artists, sitting in those chairs, have

had people that said no to us along the way," says Shelton. No matter when a contestant "goes home," Williams tries to offer one last bit of instruction that has nothing to do with singing and everything to do with life: Seize every opportunity.

Be Flexible

ADAM LEVINE

"Aim high," Levine says, but remain flexible. "You have to flow a little bit. You can't get hell-bent on there being one path to any one place." He's thankful he heeded his own advice. "The Voice would have never been something that was on [my] list. If I had been stupid about my career and been really hell-bent on one way of doing things, had I not taken that risk, my life wouldn't have been as fulfilling."



Adam's always the first to say, "Man, you get on Twitter and say something that if I said it they'd burn my house down. If you say it, it's funny."

The Voice has yet to create a breakout star on the level of American Idol's Kelly Clarkson or Carrie Underwood. But that's OK, says Stefani. "The show is not about making it," she says. "It is about this moment and learning."

"The show is not called The Success. You don't win success—you gotta earn that," Williams

"The lights are on, the cameras are on: Make this your moment," says Williams—who definitely takes his own advice. "I'm having a great time imparting what I know and paying it forward." **E**