blogging as a tool for empowerment

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Blog wordle (image via mashable.com)

This week I lead a workshop about the joys of blogging for the staff of Girls Action Foundation/Fondation Filles d'Action. The non-profit, which advocates for empowering young women and provides resources/networking, is dealing with the challenges of implementing an organizational blog.

While I am no professional blogger or social media guru, I'm enthusiastic and passionate, and I truly believe in the power of blogging to connect people, create conversation and build community. I'm also very familiar with the unique challenges which overstretched, overworked staff at non-profit organizations face with blogging, after my experience editing and blogging for ascent magazine. The irony is that these organizations can benefit enormously from the free marketing and outreach opportunities that blogs and social media provide.

So I started off the little 1.5 hour workshop by telling the lovely GAF ladies about the evolution of **it's all yoga, baby**, and the joyous community that I've discovered through the blog. Then I lead them through a 15 minute writing exercise, based on the amazing comic artcst/novelist Lynda Barry's excellent book, *What It Is*. Based on Lynda's suggestion, I made a "word bag" composed of keywords that I pulled off GAF's website – like "girls," "empowerment" and "leadership." And some that weren't, such as "Lady Gaga," "crush," and "sexting." Each woman pulled a word from the word bag and had to write about it continuously for 15 minutes, without removing her pen from the page.

The objective of the exercise was for everybody to leave with a blog post ~ and to prove that blog writing doesn't need to be time-consuming. However, what each person wrote was for their own enjoyment and they can only publish it if they want. We didn't workshop or discuss what was written. It was purely for each woman's own process. GAF gets to keep the word bag forever, and hopefully it'll come in handy if they need inspiration in the future.

We ended with some open brainstorming and questions for the GAF blog. The most common challenge for the staff was navigating the "be yourself" dictum of the blogospere when the blog is for one's workplace. I didn't have an answer, but I'm very familiar with that challenge. The only thing I could suggest was to just write and blog until the natural voice that can straddle both worlds emerges.

Similar to the GAF ladies, my introduction to blogging when I was working at ascent magazine. It drove me crazy – the blog was this extra thing that I had to do, on top of editing magazine content. Nobody on our small staff had the extra time to write on the blog, so it was a constant challenge.

However, after the magazine closed and I found myself unemployed, I started to write my own blog, for fun! I spent my sudden abundance of free time reading and commenting on blogs, and researching and writing my own blog. And in the process, I discovered a latent passion.

I hope that the workshop inspired the wonderful women at GAF, and that they will be able to get comfortable with this great medium, which offers enormous potential for them. And for other non-profit, grassroots and activist organizations, for whatever causes.