

# BRAND VOICE WORKSHOP: FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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# BRAND VOICE WORKSHOP: FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

A 60–90 minute playbook for running a brand voice workshop with your early-stage team

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## WHO THIS GUIDE IS FOR

This guide is for the person who's going to run the workshop. That's probably you, the founder. Or your head of marketing. Or whoever gets voluntold because everyone else is busy shipping features.

You don't need facilitation experience. You need the discipline to keep the room moving, the guts to force decisions when the team gets stuck, and the clarity to remind everyone why you're here.

This isn't therapy. It's not brainstorming. It's a working session with clear inputs, exercises, and outputs. By the end, you walk out with documented personality traits, tone principles, and DO/DON'T examples your team can use immediately.

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## BEFORE YOU START: PRE-WORK

### WHAT YOU NEED

People (3–8 ideal):

- Founder(s)

- Someone from marketing/growth
- Someone from product
- Someone from support/customer-facing role
- Optional: Early customers or advisors who know your brand

### **Materials:**

- Brand personality cards (free download and print)  
OR Brand Deck (\$29)
- Whiteboard or shared digital workspace (Miro, FigJam, etc.)
- Timer (phone works fine)
- Notebook for capturing decisions

### **Time:**

- 60 minutes minimum
- 90 minutes ideal
- Block your calendar, no interruptions

*WHAT YOU DON'T NEED*

- A perfect understanding of your brand (that's what the workshop builds)
  - Professional facilitation skills
  - Consensus before you start (you'll force it during the session)
  - A designer or brand agency
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## WORKSHOP FLOW OVERVIEW

**Set Context (10 min)**

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graph TD; A[Set Context (10 min)] --> B[Exercise 1: Card Sort (15 min)]; B --> C[Exercise 2: Brand as Person (10 min)]; C --> D[Exercise 3: DO/DON'T];
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**Exercise 1: Card Sort (15 min)**

**Exercise 2: Brand as Person (10 min)**

**Exercise 3: DO/DON'T**

**EXERCISE 3: DO/DON'T**  
**Examples (10 min)**



**Converge & Decide (15  
min)**



**Define Next Steps (5 min)**



**Workshop Complete: 3  
Deliverables**



The three deliverables you're building:

1. **Personality traits** (3–5 adjectives with definitions)
2. **Tone map** (how personality flexes across channels)
3. **DO/DON'T examples** (real sentences in your voice vs. not)

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## PHASE 1: SET CONTEXT (10 MINUTES)

### WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Explaining why everyone's in the room, what you're building, and what success looks like. This isn't a pitch. It's clarity.

### WHAT TO SAY

*“We're here to define how we sound so we stop rewriting everything. Right now, our pitch deck sounds different from our landing page. Our support*

*emails sound different from our marketing. Our LinkedIn posts sound like chaos. That's expensive.*

*By the end of this hour, we'll have three things: personality traits that describe us, principles for how we flex tone across channels, and real examples we can paste into docs when someone asks 'Does this sound like us?'*

*This isn't wordsmithing. This is infrastructure. Let's move."*

## **FACILITATION MOVES**

- **Time-box this:** 10 minutes max. Don't let it turn into a debate about whether brand voice matters.
- **Show the pain:** Reference a recent example where inconsistent voice caused confusion or rework.
- **Set expectations:** Make it clear you'll force decisions. Progress beats perfection.

## **COMMON PITFALL**

The room wants to solve positioning, naming, visual identity, AND voice in one sitting.

Shut that down immediately: "We're solving voice today. Positioning is next week. One workshop, one outcome."

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## PHASE 2: EXERCISE 1 - CARD SORT (15 MINUTES)

### WHAT YOU'RE BUILDING

A shortlist of 3–5 personality traits that everyone agrees describe your brand. The "You Are Not" pile is just as important as the "You Are" pile.

### SETUP

Hand out the brand personality cards (or display them digitally). Each card has one adjective: bold, playful, sophisticated, irreverent, nerdy, kind, direct, rebellious, etc.

### THE EXERCISE

Deal Cards



Individual Sort (5 min)



Group Compare (5 min)



Force Rank (3-5 traits, 5 min)

## Step 1: Individual Sort (5 minutes, silent)

Everyone sorts cards into three piles:

- "You Are" – Traits that describe your brand
- "You Are Torn" – Traits you're debating
- "You Are Not" – Traits you actively reject

*"Facilitator Script: "Sort these cards individually first. Don't talk yet. Put each card in one of three piles: You Are, You Are Torn, or You Are Not. The 'You Are Not' pile is critical. It tells us what to avoid. Five minutes, go.""*

## Step 2: Group Compare (5 minutes, discussion)

Go around the room. Each person shares their "You Are" pile. Write every trait mentioned on the whiteboard.

*"Facilitator Script: "Let's compare. Call out your 'You Are' traits one by one. I'll capture everything on the*

*board. No defending your choices yet, just call them out."*

Look for patterns. If everyone picked "direct," that's signal. If three people picked "playful" and two picked "serious," that's a tension point you need to resolve.

### **Step 3: Force Rank (5 minutes, decision)**

Narrow the list down to 3–5 core traits. Force votes if you need to.

*"Facilitator Script: "We've got 12 traits on the board. We need 3–5. Vote now. Raise your hand for the traits that are non-negotiable for our brand."*

Take the top 3–5. If there's a tie, ask: "Which one of these would we die on a hill for?" Make the call.

### **CAPTURE THE OUTPUT**

Write the final 3–5 traits on the board with short definitions IN YOUR CONTEXT.

*"Example Output (Generic SaaS):"*

- *Direct:* We say the quiet part out loud, but stay kind
- *Nerdy:* We celebrate technical depth and precision
- *Helpful:* We solve problems, not show off

### *"Example Output (DTC Brand):"*

- *Ruthless:* We murder problems, not coddle them
- *Self-aware:* We own the absurdity and don't take ourselves too seriously
- *Rebellious:* We challenge norms, not follow them

## COMMON PITFALLS

### Pitfall 1: Generic buzzwords win

If someone says "innovative" or "customer-centric," push back: "What does that look like in a sentence? If you can't show me, we park it."

### Pitfall 2: The loudest person dominates

Use silent voting and written exercises to balance voices. "Everyone writes their top 3 traits on a sticky

note. Then we compare."

### Pitfall 3: The team can't narrow down

Force it. "We have 7 traits. That's too many. Which 3 would you tattoo on the company forehead?"

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## PHASE 3: EXERCISE 2 - BRAND AS A PERSON (10 MINUTES)

### WHAT YOU'RE BUILDING

A paragraph that describes your brand as if it walked into a room and introduced itself. This unlocks tone. People stop thinking in adjectives and start hearing a voice.

### THE EXERCISE

Ask the room: "If our brand was a person who walked into this room right now, how would they introduce themselves? What would they say? What would they NEVER say?"

Give people 3 minutes to write individually, then share.

***“Facilitator Script:** “Close your eyes for a second. Our brand just walked into this room as a person. They're going to introduce themselves in 2–3 sentences. What do they say? And what would they never, ever say? Write it down. Three minutes.””*

## EXAMPLE OUTPUTS

***“Liquid Death walks in:** “Make no mistake, we will absolutely murder your thirst. Then we'll twerk on your thirst's grave. We're using health and humor to conquer the world. We'd never say 'optimize your wellness journey' or 'hydration goals.' That's boring. But enough about us.””*

***“Stripe walks in:** “We're Stripe. We build payment infrastructure so you don't have to. Our API documentation is better than your product documentation. We'd never say 'innovative payment solutions' or 'cutting-edge fintech.' We just say: it works.””*

## CAPTURE THE OUTPUT

Pick the best version or combine elements from multiple versions. Write it on the board. This becomes

your tone reference.

## COMMON PITFALLS

**Pitfall: The room writes a mission statement**

Stop them. "This isn't a mission statement. This is how your brand sounds if it had a voice and walked into a bar. Give me personality, not corporate speak."

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## PHASE 4: EXERCISE 3 - DO/DON'T EXAMPLES (10 MINUTES)

### WHAT YOU'RE BUILDING

Side-by-side examples of real sentences: one version in your voice (DO) and one version that's generic or off-brand (DON'T).

These pairs become your reference points. Your team will paste these into Slack threads, content reviews, and onboarding docs.

### THE EXERCISE

Take a real sentence from your website, pitch deck, or marketing email. Rewrite it in two ways:

- **DO:** The version that matches your brand voice
- **DON'T:** The generic or off-brand version

Do this 2–3 times for different contexts (homepage, support email, product feature description). **PRO-TIP** Have an LLM write the DON'T version, guaranteed to be generic. Then give it your brand voice as context and ask it to write the examples again. See the difference?

*“Facilitator Script: “Pull up our homepage. Read the hero text out loud. Now rewrite it in our voice based on the traits and person we just defined. Then write the DON'T version—the generic crap we'd never say. Go.””*

## EXAMPLE OUTPUTS

*“Generic SaaS (Direct, Nerdy, Helpful):*

**✗ DON'T:** *“Our platform leverages cutting-edge AI to deliver innovative solutions that empower your team*

*to achieve optimal outcomes."*

 **DO:** *"We built a tool that automates the boring parts of your workflow so you can focus on the work that matters. No fluff, no buzzwords. It just works."*

**"DTC Brand (Ruthless, Self-aware, Rebellious):**

 **DON'T:** *"Our premium product is sustainably sourced to help you live your best life."*

 **DO:** *"We made this thing because the alternatives are garbage. No apologies, no greenwashing. Just a product that does what it says."*

## **CAPTURE THE OUTPUT**

Write 2–3 DO/DON'T pairs on the board. Take photos or save them in the shared workspace.

## **COMMON PITFALLS**

**Pitfall: The DON'T examples aren't different enough**

Make the contrast sharp. The DON'T should make everyone cringe a little.

## Pitfall: The team debates every word

Time-box it. "We have 10 minutes for this exercise. Pick the version that's 80% right and move on."

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## PHASE 5: CONVERGE & DECIDE (15 MINUTES)

### WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Synthesizing everything into one short paragraph that describes your voice in human language. This is the seed of your voice charter.

### THE PROCESS

Look at the board. You've got:

- 3–5 personality traits with definitions
- A "brand as a person" intro
- 2–3 DO/DON'T example pairs

Now write one paragraph that ties it together.

*“Facilitator Script: “Let's pull this together. Based on what we've decided, how would you describe our voice to a new hire in one paragraph? Someone write it on the board while we talk it through.””*

## EXAMPLE OUTPUT

*“Our Voice (Generic SaaS): We're direct, nerdy, and helpful. We say the quiet part out loud but stay kind. We celebrate technical depth and solve problems without showing off. In practice, that means short sentences, active verbs, and no buzzwords. We'd rather explain how something works than say it's “innovative.” We'd rather show you the code than tell you we're “cutting-edge.””*

## CREATE THE TONE MAP

Now map how the personality flexes across channels. Your voice stays consistent, but tone adjusts.

Channel	Tone Adjustment
Homepage	Confident, punchy
Product docs	Precise, helpful
Support emails	Patient, kind
Social media	Casual, human

*“Facilitator Script: “Our personality stays the same, but tone flexes. How does ‘direct, nerdy, helpful’ show up differently in a support email vs. a tweet?””*

## COMMON PITFALLS

**Pitfall: The paragraph is too long**

Cut it. If you can't say it in 4–5 sentences, you don't have clarity yet.

**Pitfall: The room wants to keep debating**

Call time. “This is 80% right. We'll iterate after we use it for a week. Let's move.”

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## PHASE 6: DEFINE NEXT STEPS (5 MINUTES)

### WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Assigning ownership and setting deadlines so the work doesn't die in a Google Doc.

## THE CHECKLIST

1. **Assign an owner:** Who turns these notes into a one-page voice charter within 48 hours?
2. **Set a review date:** When does the team review the draft charter? (Aim for 1 week max)
3. **Pick a pilot project:** What's the first piece of content you'll rewrite using the new voice?
4. **Nominate a voice champion:** Who gently calls out drift for the first 90 days?

*"Facilitator Script: "We're not done until we document this. [Name], you own turning these notes into a one-page charter by Friday. [Name], you're our voice champion for the next quarter. And let's rewrite our homepage hero copy as the first test. Meeting adjourned.""*

## THE ONE-PAGE VOICE CHARTER TEMPLATE

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### [COMPANY NAME] VOICE CHARTER

#### PERSONALITY (WHO WE ARE)

- [Trait 1]: Definition in our context

- [Trait 2]: Definition in our context
- [Trait 3]: Definition in our context

## PRINCIPLES (HOW WE SOUND)

- Principle 1 in plain language
- Principle 2 in plain language
- Principle 3 in plain language

## EXAMPLES

✓ DO: "Example sentence in our voice"

✗ DON'T: "Generic version we'd never say"

✓ DO: "Another example"

✗ DON'T: "Another generic version"

## tone Map

Channel

Tone Notes

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Homepage

Confident, punchy

---

Support

Patient, helpful

---

Social

Casual, human

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# AFTER THE WORKSHOP: MAKING IT STICK

## WEEK 1: DRAFT AND REVIEW

The owner turns workshop notes into a one-page charter. Circulate it to the team. Gather feedback. Finalize within 7 days.

## WEEK 2: LIVE WALKTHROUGH

Don't just drop a link. Run a 20-minute team meeting to walk through the charter, explain the decisions, and show before-and-after examples.

## MONTH 1: BAKE INTO RITUALS

- Use the charter as a checklist in content reviews
- Add it to new hire onboarding
- Reference it in Slack when giving feedback: "This doesn't match our 'direct but kind' principle"
- Rewrite one high-impact asset per week (homepage, pitch deck, support macros)

## QUARTER 1: VOICE CHAMPION ROLE

Nominate someone to be the voice champion for 90 days. Their job:

- Call out drift (gently)
- Celebrate good examples
- Keep the charter visible

After 90 days, it should be muscle memory.

## REVISIT AT INFLECTION POINTS

Your voice shouldn't change every quarter, but it should evolve at major inflection points:

- New product lines
- New target markets
- Leadership changes
- Pivots

Schedule a light review annually. Schedule a full workshop re-run every 18–24 months or after a big shift.

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# TROUBLESHOOTING: WHEN THINGS GO SIDWAYS

**PROBLEM:** THE ROOM CAN'T AGREE ON TRAITS

**Solution:** Force a vote. "Everyone picks their top 3 non-negotiables. We count votes. Top 5 win."

**PROBLEM:** SOMEONE DOMINATES THE DISCUSSION

**Solution:** Use silent exercises. "Everyone write your answer on a sticky note. Then we compare."

**PROBLEM:** THE TRAITS ARE TOO GENERIC

**Solution:** Push for receipts. "Show me what 'innovative' looks like in a sentence. If you can't, we're not using it."

**PROBLEM:** THE WORKSHOP GOES LONG

**Solution:** Cut exercises, not decision time. Skip Exercise 3 if needed, but don't skip the convergence phase.

**PROBLEM:** THE FOUNDER WANTS TO LECTURE FOR 30 MINUTES

**Solution:** Remind them it's a workshop, not a TED talk. "Save the context. Let's move cards."

**PROBLEM: THE TEAM IGNORES THE CHARTER AFTER LAUNCH**

**Solution:** You didn't bake it into rituals. Go back and integrate it into content reviews, onboarding, and feedback loops.

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## ADAPTING THIS FOR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

### SOLO FOUNDERS

You can run a version of this solo or with 1–2 trusted advisors. The exercises still work. Write out your answers, then pressure-test them with someone who knows your market.

### REMOTE TEAMS

Use digital tools (Miro, FigJam, Mural) and tighter facilitation. Shorter segments, explicit turns to speak, and more structured async prep work.

### LARGER TEAMS (10+)

Break into smaller groups (5–7 each) for exercises, then reconvene to compare. Expect 90–120 minutes instead of 60.

## SECOND TIME RUNNING THIS

You don't need to start from scratch. Pull up the old charter, review it, and ask: "What's changed? What needs updating?" Focus on the deltas, not rebuilding from zero.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Free Brand Personality Cards – Print and use for the card sort exercise
  - Brand Deck – Premium version with more traits and better card quality
  - Build Your Writing Style Guide: The XML Framework
    - Turn your voice charter into machine-readable format for AI systems
  - Most Founders Build Brands Backwards – Why voice is one of five critical brand components
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# FINAL CHECKLIST: DID YOU GET WHAT YOU NEEDED?

By the end of the workshop, you should have:

- 3–5 personality traits with definitions
- A "brand as a person" paragraph
- 2–3 DO/DON'T example pairs
- A one-paragraph voice description
- A tone map across key channels
- An assigned owner for the voice charter
- A deadline for charter draft (within 48 hours)
- A pilot project to test the new voice

If you're missing any of these, you're not done. Go back and force the decisions.

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**Questions? Feedback?** I'm building a tool that turns workshop outputs like these into living voice systems for early-stage teams. If you run this workshop and want to go deeper, reach out. I'm looking for founders

who want to systematize their voice without hiring an agency.