

## HUMAN RESOURCES

# What does your voice say about you?

When expertise, ideas and creativity fail to get you noticed, voice coaching may be the answer. Constance Lamb looks at where you could be falling short

Whether you are in a meeting, on the ward or speaking at a conference, it is not just what you say but also how you say it that makes the impact.

On a subconscious level people make judgements about the way someone speaks. It is not the accent, but hearing the quality of the voice that forms a negative or positive perception. Also, the association we have to sound that links it to the past is what makes it so powerful.

The goal is to develop the voice so that it is congruent with your experience and expertise; that you are perceived in a positive way and can motivate and inspire others.

There are five elements to dynamic speaking:

- breathing;
- resonance;
- modulation;
- articulation;
- body language.

How does this work in practice?

A female executive, who is a trainer and regularly gives speeches at international conferences, was aware that her voice was high-pitched and wanted to change it.

She had over 20 years' NHS experience and was highly respected in her field.

However, the voice had a "little girl" quality that lacked power and authority. Her voice was incongruent with all her experience and expertise. The content of the presentation was well structured, relevant and powerful, yet her voice did not match the message.

Feedback and analysis of the presentation and vocal delivery was carried out and the focus

was on enriching the full range of the voice through breathing and resonance.

## Little voice

The client's breathing was shallow and did not support the voice. So to make it louder and fuller she practiced diaphragmatic breathing; expanding the rib cage, front, sides and back. This immediately gives the voice more power.

Resonance enriches the pitch of the voice. There are three areas of resonance: head, chest and stomach. She was resonating in the head notes, hence the high-pitched quality. Pitching the voice into the chest deepens the note and it becomes richer, fuller, and warmer.

With practice and commitment, her voice became much more powerful, the "woman's voice" emerged. Her confidence improved; she was perceived as having more gravitas. She noted that the response from the audience was more positive and engaged.

Being vocally engaging and upbeat will keep the audience hanging on your every word.

One way of achieving this is through modulation. This describes the rise and fall of the voice, it adds light and shade to the vocal delivery. By using rising inflections it will lift the energy and grab and maintain audience attention. Using too many downward inflections brings the energy down.

A monotone voice can ruin a captivating talk and send an audience off to sleep.

For example, a senior manager felt that his voice came

across as dull and lacking impact. He wasn't able to motivate and inspire his team. His vision and ideas were highly creative but he would fall flat when communicating them to his colleagues. Something needed to change.

A vocal critique and analysis found that his voice was monotone, it required more modulation and rising inflections. Often when someone speaks in monotone they're unable to inflect the voice up, because they can't "hear" the difference. By working with them either visually or kinesthetically ("tactile learning"), it allows them to produce the rising inflection more easily.

In this instance, the manager noticed his voice sounded more interesting and enthusiastic. In turn, the voice matched his real passion for his vision and ideas. He was now able to communicate his ideas more effectively. His team also noticed the difference and were motivated and inspired to take positive action.

Speaking with clarity and better pronunciation is also essential when communicating with colleagues or patients on the ward. Despite his medical knowledge, one junior doctor was perceived as a poor communicator because he mumbled, made little eye contact and was unable to inspire patients and colleagues confidence when talking to them. He constantly

had to repeat himself, which in turn took up valuable time.

A number of issues were identified:

- articulation;
- posture;
- eye contact.

When speaking on the phone there are no visual cues to help the listener. By articulating all the consonants in the words, particularly the endings of words, the junior doctor found he wasn't repeating himself.

Good posture is also integral to producing a good vocal quality. When seated ensure that the body is upright and relaxed. Slouching will impair diaphragmatic breathing and the voice will be restricted and less powerful.

In our working life, good communication skills are essential. Everyone deserves to discover that their "real voice" is dynamic, powerful and memorable. Does your voice say that about you? ●

*Constance Lamb is the Founder of Easy Speaking:  
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