

# VOICE MATTERS

**D**oes your voice matter? Is it really *that* important. Well, not really you are thinking. What I wear, how I look, what kind of suit, watch, jewellery, shoes makeup etc. really gives me the feeling of confidence in front of an audience or at an interview. Of course all of these are important considerations but did you know that in the first six seconds of contact we sub-consciously decide whether we like a person and whether we want to do business with them. So what determines that decision? It can include the warmth of the facial expression and the confidence of the stance but primarily it will depend on what issues from the mouth. Only 7% of our oral communication comes from the words we choose so that means that 93% of our effectiveness is a direct result of how we speak. Remember that many famous people including politicians such as Margaret Thatcher and Gordon Brown are widely believed to have had voice coaching. Margaret Thatcher to lower the pitch of her voice so she could be taken more seriously in a “man’s” world and Gordon Brown so that his tone was softened to sound more warm and friendly.

The voice is a highly complex mechanism and most of us know very little about it, let alone how to make the most of it. In fact we take it for granted and only give it a thought when we lose it or when we have to speak in public, at a social occasion or business meeting. This is a great pity as the voice is one of your most important marketing tools. It can secure that all important contract, sell you or your products and services. If your delivery or sales pitch is dynamic and sincere people will remember you.

An expert voice coach can help give you the knowledge which will enable you to develop your voice to its full potential. You will all have heard the speaker at a conference or seminar who really knows their subject but lacks vocal power or variety – because of this they fail to get their message across.

The voice utilises a wide range of muscles, nearly all of which can be strengthened by exercises – lungs, diaphragm, intercostals, abdominals, vocal cords, lips and tongue. To speak clearly it is essential that the voice is powered correctly and the articulation muscles in the mouth need to be strong. It is interesting to see how only a slight widening of the mouth when you speak can improve volume and the tongue tip can be strengthened with regular tongue-twister exercises.

Do you know what keeps our interest when we listen to a speaker? It is simple – VARIETY! You know how changes of pitch and pace impact on your content. Add pauses for effect, complex inflections, emphatic stress and support your spontaneity with the appropriate tone.

If the idea of speaking in public fills you with dread remember that knowledge is power and you can overcome your panic with the right ammunition!

Perhaps you are a trainer, a solicitor or another “high voice user”. If you are then the way you protect your voice from damage can impact on your effectiveness on a day to day basis. This is an important health and safety issue but most businesses using call centres or tele-sales have not considered the cost-effectiveness of voice training for their staff. A half-day workshop can teach skills that will avoid many hours of sick leave due to tired or weak voice. Not only this, the improved correct use of the voice will improve the hit rate and sales of your products if a potential client is approached on the phone by a friendly, warm, confident voice.

Are you a woman in a man’s world – remember Margaret Thatcher! If you want to maintain your authority then think about how the pitch of your voice can make you more effective. It is possible to change almost anything about a voice if the individual has sufficient determination. Generally it is not necessary to lose your accent to communicate well but you may want to improve your clarity by concentrating on the consonants. This is particularly important for anyone who is speaking English as a second language. Here, a good voice coach, who has understanding of how all speech sounds are formed can really make a difference.

Whether you take coaching individually or in a workshop situation you will learn fascinating information that will enable you to speak your way to success.

So don’t forget - - - - ***VOICE MATTERS!***

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