

Speaking with Power: Being Memorable

What Makes People Perceive You as Powerful?

(Whether you are in front of one person or 1,000)

Taking up Space Through:

- Eye contact
- Facial Expressions
- Body Language
- Movement
- Voice Inflection

Passion and Believability

- Feeling and speaking with passion creates belief

Reframing Public Speaking

- It's just like a sport that you can practice at, work at, and improve at.

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Preventions and Cures for Non-Voice Problems that Show Up in the Voice

Regardless of how well you use your voice, how tired you are, and so on, these measures will help you avoid most of the voice problems that come up. They will be crucial if you are nervous, tired, or possibly not well prepared.

- Rehearse, so you feel comfortable with your presentation.
- Warm up your voice and body before your session.
- Work on eye contact. The calming effect will work on your voice, too.
- Avoid things that create physical problems. Drink decaffeinated coffee and soft drinks if caffeine gives you the shakes. Avoid chocolate and dairy products if you have a cold; they tend to add to the gunk in your throat. Citrus juices, hot tea, lemons are much better.
- Take stretch breaks while your students are on coffee breaks. Be sure to do the head-rolling stretch and yawn.
- The head-rolling exercise: Let your head drop forward, slowly roll it around to the left, then around to the back, then to the right, and forward again. Then reverse the process. Do this very slowly, in a continuous motion.
- Stand up straight and use gestures. This will wake you up, relax you, and make you at least *look* and *sound* alive, even if you don't *feel* particularly alive.

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Cures for Vocal Problems You Weren't Aware You Had

If you receive some feedback or discover via audio- or videotape that you have a voice problem that you weren't aware of (perhaps you are a monotone or a pitch-dropper, or your voice is nasal, hooty, or robot-like with a constant volume and pitch), here are some measures which will help.

First, just recognizing that you have a voice problem is an important step. If you haven't been doing whatever this problem is for very long, making the correction will be virtually automatic.

But if the problem is a well-entrenched bad habit, you'll need some practice sessions to dislodge it.

- Practice with video: rehearse.
- If you sound dull, in practice sessions, practice doing the opposite. Be ridiculous, exaggerate everything, and be as undignified as you can -- for the videotape. This will help counterbalance your tendency toward dullness.
- If you have artificially lowered your voice, work on getting variety in your pitch, especially the highs. Get used to using the upper end of your speaking range as well as the lower.
- For problems of nasality and hootiness, yawning provides a release; so when you speak again, the effect will be lessened.
- Concentrating on producing round vowels also helps cure nasality and hootiness. Practicing switching back and forth between nasal and non-nasal tones helps, too, to zero in on the difference and gain control.
- Get a good friend or colleague to give you feedback. Make sure it is someone who will tell you when you've done something well, not just when you have done something badly.
- The only cure for irritating speech pattern habits (umpteenth "okays") and unnecessarily sloppy diction is awareness – and that's a problem because what's happening is unconscious. Practice with audio- or videotape, get colleague feedback (it's better to do both), and do so regularly.

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Voice Production Problems

The other basic cause of voice and speech problems is poor voice production, which is comprised largely of:

- Poor listening, and
- Poor breathing.

Poor voice production is often greatly aggravated by non-voice problems like lack of warm-up, tension, fatigue, etc.

Poor production can result in:

- Pitch, volume, tone, and diction problems
- Fatigue. (It is much harder to produce your voice badly than it is to produce it well.)

Proper voice production isn't particularly difficult, but it does take practice and time to break old habits and form new ones.

Good Voice Production

- **Posture.** Stand up straight. You aren't going to get a decent sound if you stand (or sit) like limp spaghetti.
- **Breathing.** When you inhale, expand your rib cage. Don't expand until it hurts or feels uncomfortably stretched; just expand it and keep it expanded.

Feel the rib cage separate from your hips. (Dancers call this "lift.") Some people envision skyhooks lifting them at the shoulders; others try for a sensation of greater distance between the bottom of the rib cage and the hips; and others concentrate on the upper body feeling very light. Whatever image works for you is fine.

Take a deep -- not a *huge* -- breath. You can't control a huge breath easily, and you may give yourself enough of a draft in your throat to bring on a coughing spasm. Also, several huge breaths will make you hyperventilate and you may pass out.

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Now, say or sing something. Don't let the rib cage collapse as you let the air out. Keep it expanded.

Don't push the breath. The balance between breath and sound is a delicate one. Your body will take care of this balance very nicely if you don't push air or tense up. It is a far too subtle balance to consciously and directly create.

Don't worry about "breathing from your diaphragm." This breathing method makes breathing from your diaphragm happen automatically. You don't need to worry about that as a separate issue.

If you want to improve your breath control and capacity, do the "hissing exercise." Take in a good breath. Now, keeping your rib cage expanded all the while, let the breath out slowly, hissing through your teeth. Make the hissing steady, like a slow leak, and keep it going steadily as long as you can.

If you keep your rib cage expanded, your diaphragm will gradually move upward as the air goes out. You'll feel your stomach going inward, and that's exactly what is supposed to happen. If you do this two or three times a day, you'll soon notice quite a difference in your breath capacity.

Projection. Projection refers to how the voice carries. It's the process that makes it possible for your students to hear you in the back of the room. The key to it all is listening, and any or all of the following methods will help:

1. Practice listening to yourself. Imagine that your ears are located about six inches to a foot in front of your nose. That sounds ridiculous, since your ears are pretty stationary, but try it. Concentrate on hearing yourself in that space.

You don't have to do anything. Don't push air or do things to your throat. Your ears will lead you the right way with a little practice.

This exercise will help your voice become more resonant, and will help keep you from tensing up your throat.

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2. In the classroom, talk to the back row. You don't have to shout. Just pretend that you are having a normal conversation with people who are that distance away. Your voice will again adjust automatically.

For example, when two people have a conversation sitting fairly close to each other, neither one has to think consciously of how loudly they speak; they automatically speak for that distance. If they move farther apart, they adjust automatically. Take advantage of that automatic adjustment by thinking of talking to the back row, and your voice will probably reach everyone.

3. In the classroom and in practice, listen for a reverberation or a ring when you speak. In a large room with no draperies to soak up the sound or extraneous noises like blowing fans, the ring should be pretty strong. That's "resonance." Resonance is what makes it possible for an actor to speak very softly on stage and still be heard in the back row.

If you're not sure what your resonance sounds like, stand a foot or two from a wall and talk into it. You should hear a pretty strong ring. Then you'll know what to aim for.

4. Use vowels -- A, E, I, O, U, and their combinations. Pronounce them so you can hear them distinctly. You can't make much sound with most consonants -- D, S, T, and so forth -- so make up for the lack by pronouncing the vowels clearly. The difference between singers and speakers who can't be heard without a microphone and those who can is usually their neglect or use of vowels.

Notice that none of these methods says anything about talking louder. If you have resonance, you don't need to talk more loudly. Loudness can be saved for emphasis.

Cures for Diction Problems

For diction problems, the following methods will work:

- Use vowels. All the clear consonants in the world won't help if there aren't clear vowels in your words. In practice, concentrate on really hearing each vowel in each word so that the word comes out clearly.

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- Wake up your mouth muscles. Do some silly-looking exercises, such as sticking your tongue out or making faces with your mouth. They will help your speech come out more clearly.
- Practice with "Peter Piper" and other tongue twisters, and with Dr. Seuss stories.
- Listen to yourself very carefully, practice with a tape recorder, or feedback will speed up the process tremendously.

Warm-Ups

Finally, before you go into the classroom, warm up your voice. Warming up is probably your best insurance against voice problems and vocal discomfort. Don't neglect it.

- Do some bends and stretches. Do the head-rolling stretch. Yawn a few times.
- Wake up your mouth muscles. Do those silly-looking exercises just mentioned.
- Sing or talk as high as you can and then as low as you can, within the bounds of physical comfort. Get used to using your entire range. Don't worry about the words; this is just for the range.
- Do a "crazy reading." Take the editorial page, an operations manual, or a piece of junk mail and read it aloud. Read Dr. Seuss books to your kids. If you don't feel like reading, use the alphabet. Exaggerate it in pitch, pace, volume, and tone. Make it as crazy as you can.

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Guidelines for Handling Audience Questions

Transition into the question period:

- Invite audience input
 - AVOID: "Are there any questions?"
 - BETTER: "I welcome your comments or questions."
 - Or "I'm sure you have some questions or observations. Feel free to share them."
- Suggest potential topics.
 - "One area we skimmed over was ..."
 - "I'd be happy to elaborate if you'd like."
- Invite contributions.
 - " I'm interested in hearing about experiences any of you have had with this program."
- Use humor.
 - "No questions? Let's see. This must mean either my presentation was so outstanding or I answered all your questions. ... or was it so confusing you don't know what to ask first?"

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Some tips for fielding questions:

- Listen to the entire questions.
- Make sure you understand it
- Repeat the question.
- Resolve factual errors quickly.
- Clarify the question
- Give everyone a chance to ask questions.
- Answer to the whole audience - not just the questioner.
- Answer positively - without apology.
- Hold your temper.
- Be careful with humor, sarcasm and criticism.
- Expand as you answer, but don't get carried away.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."

REMEMBER: Ending the *QIA* session with a final summary gives you back some control.

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