

## **Five Good Ideas about Using Your voice to Deliver your Message**

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### **1. Your voice is your 'second first impression'**

The first impression you give is obviously created by your appearance and body language. The second is made by your voice so it is very important to use your voice effectively. The tone of your voice conveys your message so don't forget to stress the words that carry the meaning of what you are saying, and to be conversational in style. It is also important to stress the words at the end of the phrase to avoid trailing off.

### **2. Be enthusiastic**

Try to show that you genuinely care about what you are talking about. If you put energy into your voice your listeners will pick up on this and are more likely to take an interest. Put a smile in your voice – especially on the phone when the sound of your voice is doubly important. It creates a good impression and will get a positive reaction.

### **3. Pace yourself**

Try to avoid talking too slowly or quickly – and don't be afraid of 'dead air'. A long pause gives listeners a chance to think about your comments. Also, try to say 'um' or 'er' as little as possible. It can give the impression that you are under-prepared (even if you are not) or are not clear in what you are saying. Instead, try to take a deep breath whenever you feel the urge to say 'um'.

### **4. Project your voice.**

One of the main causes of poor voice projection is holding one's breath. This is a natural physiological reaction to nervousness but you can overcome it by deliberately controlling your breathing. Have a little sticky note in front of you that simply says 'breathe'. This will serve as a reminder to breathe evenly and deeply. It will also give you a deeper, more resonant voice. Be aware that your throat and vocal chords may tighten without you even noticing, so keep this in mind and purposefully relax them before and during your presentation or speech.

### **5. Eliminate nervousness**

One way to do this is to remind yourself, 'don't be perfect!' If you are afraid of making a mistake, just think about it from the point of view of your audience - they are unlikely to notice or care. Have a plan so that when (not if!) you leave something out or slip up you can recover from your mistake more easily. If some-one asks a question to which you don't have the answer, thank the person for the question and say that you would need to get back to her/him later about it – and make sure that you do. Having strategies like this in place will reduce your nerves. You can also try physical exercises such as jumping jacks as these will help you relax. Finally, use positive self talk to give yourself encouragement.

And don't forget – practice regularly, get feedback and give yourself three to six months to see improvements.

### **Further tips**

In addition to these five good ideas, here are some other practical tips you may want to consider:

### **Preparation**

If you are under-prepared and feel nervous you may fall into some of the bad habits mentioned above, such as holding your breath and saying 'um' repeatedly. So make sure you prepare well and really know your subject. However, the trap many people fall into is putting too much time and

energy into writing their powerpoint presentations, without practicing and preparing what they are going to say. The slides should only be an aid to what you are saying and definitely should not be too text-heavy.

One of the problems with powerpoint presentations is that the audience's eyes are drawn to the screen instead of towards you. This means that you risk losing their focus and attention. While using powerpoint may make you feel less nervous – because people are looking at the screen instead of at you – ultimately it detracts from your presentation because you are there to present the information, engage the audience and answer questions. Otherwise they could just read the screen. Similarly, if you can avoid it, don't circulate your presentation in advance. People will read it and feel that they don't need to listen.

### **Know your audience**

Even if you give the same presentation ten times, each one will be slightly different depending on the audience. In advance, think about what the audience wants from your presentation (not what you think they need to know) and try to deliver on that. If you do not know what your audience is expecting it makes your job that much harder.

### **Speaking notes versus script**

A confident speaker is unlikely to have more than a page or two of points and reminders that they can refer to in order to keep to the structure of their presentation. But if you are making a speech or presentation, and you really don't feel comfortable using just some short notes or prompts, then don't be afraid to write it out. If you do this, make sure you practice it repeatedly until you are familiar with the material. Also, it is worth underlining the words that you wish to stress and putting gaps or hyphens between words to remind yourself to pause.

### **Pausing**

How do you know when to make a pause? Often, it is obvious where a natural pause should occur: when delivering the most important point, to let it sink in, for example; or when concluding a point before moving onto the next one. Pausing generally comes directly after emphasis. There is no right or wrong answer – often there are a number of different ways to emphasize your point. What's important is that you do it. If you do not, your voice will be monotonous and people will tune out.

### **Public speaking and technology**

If using any kind of technology during your presentation or speech, it is worth practicing with it beforehand. This is especially useful with microphones as they can be particularly distracting. If using a lapel microphone, try it out and decide where on your clothes you will put it. Familiarize yourself with the basics: the room you will be in, whether you will be on a stage, using a podium etc. It's great if you can avoid being stuck behind a podium as it allows you to move around, engage with the audience and keep people's attention more easily. Sometimes, however, you may be in a more formal setting where you are expected to stay in one place. Just be sure to know what to expect in advance.

### **Eye contact**

Maintaining eye contact with an entire audience is not easy. Some people avoid looking at anyone in the audience and instead stare over the tops of people's heads – don't do this! Equally, do not single out one person in the audience and just look at them. This will make them feel uncomfortable and the rest of the audience will feel left out. Instead, allow your eyes to sweep the room and briefly look an audience member in the eye, before moving on to someone else.