

Stop and Breathe

By Stephanie Bickel

Take a moment and think about how you coach an excited or emotional child to calm down. You might say, “focus” or “settle.” The most effective technique is to ask someone to “take a deep breath.” Try to remember how you were coached to calm down and how you currently coach yourself to calm down. Do you remember to take a deep breath?

Breath is the connection between mental thought and verbal expression. When the breath is not connected to the thought, the words have less meaning. The resulting message may also be different than the original intention. When breath and thought are not connected, people speak rashly, out of turn, and most importantly incorrectly. Damage can also be done to the voice when not speaking on the breath. The voice is strained and fatigued. A person who does not connect breath to thought also appears less in control, less knowledgeable, less powerful, and even unpleasant to be around.

Challenge:

Start monitoring how you breathe around others. Make a point to check in on your breath throughout your work day. This is the prime environment for poor breathing. Check the depth of your breath and the quality. How long is your exhale? How relaxed is it? Are you breathing naturally, holding your breath, or shallow breathing? Try to keep your breath relaxed while you speak. At the end of a phrase or thought, give yourself the freedom to inhale. Imagine that with each inhale, you are more inspired. Inhale for inspiration. So many clients believe that speed is more important than connection. Do you fall into this category? Do you force a dead or stale breath to carry you through as many sentences as you can possibly manage? Then, are you forced to pick up a breath in the middle of a thought? This interrupts your momentum, message, and meaning. You have to work harder than you should to regain the attention of your audience if you have to pick up in the middle of a statement.

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Solution:

Give yourself permission to BREATHE. Give yourself permission to slow down. Your breath will center, focus, and ground you. If you remember to “STOP AND BREATHE,” you will find people are more interested in your response. You will also find that your response will be clearer and more concise. You appear direct and confident. When you are connected to your breath, you hold the power in every conversation!



Stephanie is the Founder and Director of Speak by Design, an executive coaching firm based out of Chicago. Speak by Design provides private and group trainings for people seeking to become crisp, confident, and credible communicators. Services include executive coaching, presentation skills, vocal image, accent reduction, and other custom training programs. Visit them at www.speakbydesign.com.