

Voice Makeover

By Stephanie Bickel

Some clients complain that their day-to-day speaking style is slipping. They think they sound tired, lifeless, stressed, or weak. The quickest way to improve your voice is to concentrate on vocal energy, rate of speech, and volume.

Vocal Energy

Accommodate your listeners by maintaining high vocal energy until the very last syllable. Never drop the vocal energy at the end of a sentence or phrase!

Your vocal energy is determined by your breath. Breath supports your sound. If you drop your vocal energy before you finish speaking, you diminish your credibility and the impact of your message, and you risk losing your listeners' attention.

Exercise: Practice actually increasing your volume in a dramatically exaggerated fashion on the following phrases. Imagine your sound traveling out and upward.

- a. Hello
- b. My name is ...
- c. How are you today?
- d. Where is the men's/lady's room?
- e. Please charge that to my account.
- f. I cannot help you with that.

Rate of Speech

Speak at an easily understood rate of speech!

Memorizing your material, wanting to finish as soon as possible, and being extremely nervous will increase your rate of speech. Speaking at approximately 140 words per minute enables the listener to process what the speaker is saying and to be present in the conversation at the same time.

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Volume

Before jumping on a conference call or beginning a conversation, remind yourself to use your fully-supported voice. When you support your voice, you sound confident and secure within yourself. When you know how to project your voice and focus your sound, you can adjust it effortlessly to fill the size of most rooms. Some spaces demand a microphone.

One of my favorite exercises comes from the Roy Hart Theatre of Paris. Cover your ears with the palms of your hands. Press gently on your ears. Using the word “Pow”, imagine that your head is exploding through your ears. Use a lot of breath and intensity when saying the word, “Pow”. When you say “Pow” imagine that a burst of air throws your hands off your ears. Repeat.

Another good exercise to remind yourself to support your sound is simply to exhale on the consonant “z”. It will sound like you are buzzing like a bumblebee. Use a lot of breath and intensity. Try to increase your volume. Notice how much farther your breath goes when you support your sound.

Never give up on your voice. All voices can be improved. The voice is like any other part of your body. Without proper care and exercise it atrophies. In your conversations be mindful of your vocal energy, rate of speech, and volume. Keeping these in check is the easiest way to ensure your making the most of your vocal impact!

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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.

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