

MAKE YOUR VOICE WORK FOR YOU

Elizabeth Kuhnke, Executive Presence Coach and author of the bestselling book *Body Language for Dummies*, insists that being able to control your voice is crucial to your success...

Whilst many of us take our voices for granted, many respected and influential people undergo voice training to improve their image at some point in their careers. Several public figures are reported to have had voice training, including Margaret Thatcher who learnt to lower her voice to sound more authoritative, George Osborne who wanted to be closer to the public by sounding less upper class and David Beckham who took lessons to deepen his voice in preparation for a career after football.

Your voice can strengthen your message or, it can make you sound unconvincing and indecisive, greatly affecting others' perception of you.

There are different types of voices applied in different contexts. The head voice is used for excitement (children use it all the time), the chest voice expresses authority, the voice of the heart is saved for feelings and is very difficult to access if you're not connected to the feeling and finally, the gut voice conveys your deepest, truest beliefs.

Women frequently go into their head voice and can be perceived as less credible and persuasive than men. While using the head voice is fine for showing enthusiasm and excitement, avoid staying in 'head register' for too long. Equally, don't use the chest voice too long, as it will sound monotonous. The key to successful application of your voice is variety, which keeps your listeners engaged and helps emphasise the points you are making.

Correct breathing is the foundation for a strong voice. In order to improve your breathing technique you should learn to use the maximum lung capacity which can be achieved by an upright posture. Stand with your feet firmly planted under your body, hip width apart, open your chest by bringing together your shoulder blades. Take a deep breathe at the beginning of your speech making your lungs expand fully. These simple preparations will ensure you will not run out of breath in the middle of the sentence and will feel calmer and more confident.

Finally, when it comes to speaking, think about the 'CAR' formula - Connect, Articulate, Resonate. Connect with your material and your listener, addressing their needs and concerns. Be articulate - if you can't be understood your audience will tune out.

Resonate - think of yourself as a lighthouse, with your voice like the beam of light, projecting itself into the darkness. You want to resonate both physically and intellectually with your audience so that your message is heard completely.'

Elizabeth Kuhnke is Managing Director and Founder of Kuhnke Communication, and has over twenty years experience working with FTSE 100 companies, professional services, charities and individuals providing one-to-one and group coaching in key areas relating to public speaking and image projection. Her international best selling book *Body Language for Dummies* is available in 7 languages and is the brand's number 2 best seller in the UK.

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