

## **“The 4 voices of leadership” or “Sound Advice”**

*“It’s not what you say, it’s the way  
you say it.”*

We often talk about body language these days. And we’ve all got quite good at noticing the ticks and tags of our leaders; little signs of discomfort in interviews, the subtle pointers to lack of congruence when politicians express opinions.

Malcolm Gladwell, in his entertaining book, *Blink*, tells how the psychologist Paul Ekman has caught on tape the smallest of visual clues that a person is lying. When the spy Kim Philby is asked if he has committed treason, Ekman describes the fleeting millisecond of facial expression that crosses Philby’s face, “like the cat who ate the canary”, before he resumes once again his serious demeanour. We catch a micro-glimpse of the spy’s pleasure at duping his interviewer.

How people speak – the *sound* they make – has generally been investigated much less by researchers into communication. And for the population in general, apart from accents, we distinguish very little: high voice, deep voice, squeaky voice, rich voice – we tend to leave it at that. In the Philby example, nothing is detected from his voice. Philby answers confidently, “in the plummy tones of the English upper class”. Does his voice in fact give nothing away?

In fact, the way your voice resonates tells a detailed story about you, not only about your present state of mind, but about your history. And we are not talking accents here.

*“Light travels faster than  
sound. This is why some people  
appear bright until you hear  
them.”*

What are the signposts to what is going on?

### **A voice that never changes.**

Imagine the same tone and level (i.e. pitch) of voice for the following statements:

That was unforgivable. How dare you!

It was the most beautiful day of my life.

Mine’s a cheese and chutney please.

Monotonous? Meaningless even? Many people have only one voice. They talk nasally, or in a dull monotone, or in a tight constricted way, or very high like a child. Whatever they say, however emotional the content might presume to be, the voice just comes out the same.

**The cause?** At some time in their life, they have separated emotion from expression, and introduced tension into the shoulders, the neck, the jaw, or all three. Tension in these places can be of the moment, but some they will have been carrying around since they were very young in response to early trauma or life experience. Full expression of the whole range of human communication is blocked by this tightness, gripped by the tension. If you close your throat or grip your jaw, you are cutting off the main part of your body – where feelings, emotions, natural impulses, and most of what makes us truly human lie.

### **The manufactured voice**

Some people speak in a pleasant way but still have a voice that is basically cut off. It doesn't really connect. It can be deep and imposing, rich and resounding, energetic and thrusting, or warm and pleasant. But the sound does not express what is going on. The listener is deceived – and often the speaker is deceived as well! How to tell that the voice is manufactured? Mostly by the fact that this voice too varies minimally. Whether the person is happy, sad, upset or determined, the voice sounds much the same. Kim Philby's plummy tone was such a voice.

**The cause?** Someone who speaks in this way decided (sub-consciously probably) at some stage in their life not to reveal everything that was going on – in other words to put up a mask to hide emotions that didn't seem acceptable. You will never get an instinctive response from someone who speaks like this – there is always an infinitesimal pause before reaction to another person. Ask a spontaneous person about an exciting occasion and they will come back on the instant with warmth and excitement in the voice, "Oh, it was wonderful!" Ask a one-voice person, and you are more likely to get, "Er, we had a great time, thank you."

### **The free voice**

The voice that is truly expressive, and thus influential, is relatively free of bodily tension. If your voice is free the sound resonates in all parts

*"There is no index of character so sure as the voice"*  
*Benjamin Disraeli*

of your body, communicating every nuance of what you are saying. As you become excited, your voice goes up in pitch for a moment, as you sound determined, the voice resonates against your chest, as you express care or concern, your voice comes from your heart. The voice does this automatically, constantly varying, reflecting spontaneously the meaning

of your communication. Hundreds of bones and muscles in your body are involved in conveying your meaning through resonance.

One of the finest voice coaches of our age, Cecily Berry, who worked for years as Voice Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company and taught many of our greatest actors, said:

*" Speaking is part of a whole: an expression of inner life."*

Her pupil, Kristen Linklater, also well-known internationally as a voice coach, talks about the transparent voice:

*The natural voice is transparent – revealing, not describing, inner impulses of emotion and thought, directly and spontaneously. The person is heard, not the person's voice.*

## Resonance

Most people have some tension in the voice, and therefore their voice does not resonate freely in all parts of their body. Some people have almost no access to a particular resonance, and this coincides with lack of access to the personal qualities associated with that vibration. To give a few examples:

*His voice was as intimate as the rustle of sheets. Dorothy Parker*

The inhibited person has no head resonance and usually little body resonance either. The voice tone seems to come in a constricted way from around the neck and throat.

Someone who has not fully grown up in some respects, who lacks conviction or whose self image is as son or daughter more than adult for example, may have a voice with predominant head resonance, which sounds childish or immature.

*Her voice is full of money. F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Great Gatsby*

Someone who is over-intellectual, like the stereotypical college professor whose knowledge of life is confined to logic and rational processes and avoidance or ignorance of emotion, will have a tighter version of the immature voice, with resonance in head and throat and no deeper tones.

A dominant personality, who outwardly lacks feeling or the ability to laugh at herself, speaks entirely with strong chest resonance, and lacks the softer tones of the heart resonance and the bright head resonance.

Someone who cares excessively what others think and finds it difficult to take a stand against the opinions of others, will lack the resonance in the chest that gives his sound confidence and conviction.

## **Resonance and Leadership**

The resonance in your head and body reveals the extent to which you access personal qualities, and is also an excellent indicator of your leadership strengths. If there are certain major resonances that you never use, this is a sure indicator of areas of leadership that you ignore or find more difficult.

The voice of course resonates in different parts of your body simultaneously with varying strength, but for clarity we will look at the resonators separately.

### **Voice of the Head – the enthusiastic leader**

The voice of the head has two main qualities: it shows energy and excitement, and it carries well. People with natural enthusiasm and vitality tend to speak at a higher pitch, and certainly raise the pitch into the head at moments of excitement. For example, if they exclaim, "It was **fantastic!**", the pitch goes way up for the "tas" of "fantastic".

The resonance in the head gives clear ringing tones, that carry into an audience. If the enthusiastic leader connects with her audience, she will carry everyone along naturally with her energy.

#### **Try this out for yourself**

Speak the following phrases all on one tone, not allowing the pitch to slip higher or lower:

"That was **absolutely amazing!**"

"What a **fantastic offer!**"

"That's a **brilliant suggestion!**"

Now repeat them, allowing your voice to go higher on the accented syllables. Notice a big difference in the impact?

### **Voice of the Chest – the determined leader**

There is a hard bone across your chest – the sternum. This sets up a strong resonance when you are convinced and determined, when you believe something and your intellect holds it to be true. This voice sounds confident, grown-up and purposeful. Listen to Sir Winston Churchill, Bill Clinton, John F. Kennedy: their tone of voice gives weight to what they say.

The determined leader has resolution and stature. The message to followers is, "I will not waver. I am strong and courageous". It's the voice of the man or woman of action, who makes decisions firmly and moves things forward. On the other hand, if someone makes a determined statement and it resonates in a different place – in the heart for example – most people intuitively know that the speaker is not unwavering, but seeks approval for instance.

**Try this out for yourself**

To produce this resonance, it can be easier to think first of something that makes you angry, and speak strongly about that, using such phrases as,

*"It's very wrong!"*

*"It shouldn't be allowed to happen"*

*"I hate it when ..."*

Then in an emphatic voice without being angry, speak about something you have a firm opinion about. If you are concerned about other people's opinions of your views, you will find it hard to do. This voice of conviction doesn't change whatever others' views might be.

Listen for this voice in politicians and other leaders and listen for its absence. If you listen to Tony Blair for instance, you will hear that although he does use this voice on occasions, he is more at home with enthusiasm and with speaking from the heart.

**Voice of the Heart – the passionate (and compassionate) leader**

If you speak with feeling your voice will naturally resonate around the area of the heart. This voice connects directly with the feelings of your listeners. It literally captures hearts.

*"The best voices engage the heart, the mind and the body."*  
*Richard Eyre*

The compassionate leader connects with people, motivates through capturing people's hearts and minds, shows understanding and empathy. Listen to the greatest leaders: Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela. They all speak from the heart, and *move* their listeners to action, i.e. by touching them emotionally – they are *moved*.

Speaking from the heart requires you to feel the appropriate emotion at the very moment you are speaking. If you do not 'relive' the emotion, the voice does not resonate in this heart place, simple as that.

**Try this out for yourself**

To speak from the heart you need only to get in touch with real feeling and allow it to be heard. However, many people have lost this ability. You might like to try speaking where you won't be heard at first. Talk aloud about something that matters to you, something you care deeply about: is it a person, or a place that is close to your heart, or something you love to do? Speak softly if it seems right.

## **Voice of the Gut – the intuitive leader**

When your voice resonates deep in your body, the whole body is engaged. There is a low voice used by highly influential people which everyone listens to, because it comes so surely from the whole person. It is the quiet voice of intuition, the voice that captures a deeper felt truth, and it carries with it an authority that is instantly recognised and acknowledged. Imagine a noisy meeting, and then a voice is heard to say quietly something like:

“Go for it.”

or

“It won’t work.”

or

“That’s it. That’s the answer”.

Everyone turns towards the voice as they hear its quiet certainty.

The intuitive leader listens to the inner voice of wisdom and follows its deep instinct. This voice is more often associated with maturity than with a younger person. It is the missing piece of leadership after you have learned all the active skills. It belongs to *being* more than to *doing*.

### **Try this out for yourself**

Settle down into your body, relax, and hum in a quiet low voice. Feel how your whole body vibrates with the deep sound. That is the voice of the gut.

Think of something you hold as a truth from your deeper purpose, and give it voice.

“I believe in peace.”

“Respect – that’s my deepest value.”

“That’s my truth.”

What is it that needs to be said? Say it in that low voice.

Your voice does not lie. It reveals much more about you than you would imagine. If you want to be an effective leader, you need to lead from your whole truth, using positive energy, determination, compassion and intuition.

Working on your voice is an exciting journey, for it reveals facets of yourself that need to emerge for successful leadership. It is a physical learning: breathing, posture and relaxation are all important, but it is equally a learning of mind, heart and spirit. When these are integrated, the positive, balanced leadership that emerges creates success in every system of its endeavour: organisation, corporation, team, and family. You ‘find your voice’ in the deepest sense.

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Visit her website at [www.voiceofinfluence.co.uk](http://www.voiceofinfluence.co.uk) to learn more about how she can help you find your voice and perform with confidence and impact, and get her FREE e-courses – "The 10 Secrets for Overcoming Performance Anxiety" and "How to Perform with Authority".