



Your Voice is Your Business

Seven Voice Strategies
For Vocal Brilliance

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Introduction

Whatever your profession or topic might be, whether you occasionally make presentations to groups, whether you work as a professional conference speaker, or whether you fall somewhere in between, this paper has been written for you.

As a Speaker, your voice is your key communication instrument and your fundamental mode of communication with your audience. Your voice, and how you use it, carries much more weight than supporting factors such as how you look, how you dress, how you move and any multimedia elements that accompany your presentation. These factors, of course are important, in that they serve to augment the power of your words and your voice. However, it is your words, and how you express them that determine how well your information and ideas are received, and how successfully they 'stick' in the minds of your listeners.

This paper is all about your voice, how you use it, and the incredible richness of vocal expression. Many of the concepts covered are the vocal counterparts of body language. They are the foundations on which 'Vocal Consciousness' was built: a system of principles and strategies which promote vocal understanding; foster expressive speaking and nurture insightful listening. Vocal Consciousness is Tim's most popular keynote and after-dinner speaking topic.

Aspects of vocal expressiveness and the human voice are explored as they relate to speaking and presenting information to audiences, enabling you to express yourself authentically in harmony with who you are and who you wish to become. Seven key vocal strategies are presented which will improve the naturalness, impact and engagement of your vocal delivery. Combined with solid content, these strategies will build greater trust, connection and understanding between you, the speaker, and each member of your audience.

Authenticity and congruency are words used frequently in the speaking profession. But too often, they are only used in terms of congruency between our words and our body language. True authentic self-expression involves harmonisation of all our communication modes: Verbal, Vocal and Visual; congruency between our thoughts and our feelings about those thoughts; and close alignment between our subject area, our lifestyle and actions --"walking our talk".

"To be authentic it's absolutely essential that the sound of your voice aligns with the words you say and who you are. Your voice is a huge part of your identity. It's the words you speak and the sound you make. It's the expression of your purpose." - Katherine Scott



How does Your Voice Sound to You?

What do you love about your voice?

This isn't a facetious question. Your voice is a representation of you. It is the projection of your thoughts and feelings; your identity - as others perceive it. Accordingly, the attitudes you hold about your voice can offer insights into the personal relationship you have with yourself. In the words of Dr. Louise Mahler, "Understanding your Voice is understanding your Personal Journey." Changing how you feel about your voice will instantly be reflected in how you feel about you, and how you present to others.

When people first hear their voice from a recording, many have a negative reaction to how it sounds. Taking into account any distortions and limitations of the technology, what you hear from a recording is largely how everyone else - other than you - hears your voice. So, if there are aspects of your voice that you don't like, then it is worth spending some time and attention to explore the 'what' and the 'why', and determine if you are able to remedy some of your less preferred vocal characteristics. It is also just as important to see if you can accept, embrace and work with the natural characteristics inherent in your voice, since they are currently part of who you are.

Working on your voice characteristics can either be done in partnership with a great voice coach, or it can be done as a personal journey of self-discovery and greater awareness, with the aid of a digital voice recorder.

When you listen closely to a recording of your own voice, you are given the gift of hearing vocal elements that are in your voice, but which are normally concealed from your conscious awareness. A recording helps you get a glimpse into your shadow self, or what I call the Vocological echo.

"Through the practice of deep listening, you will encounter your voice as your very self, with an acceptance and compassion that inspires a deeply felt process of self-inquiry." - Cloé Goodchild

Voice Researcher, Dr. Lillian Glass, found that people with attractive voices are perceived as being more visually attractive than people with nasal or less attractive voices, independent of their actual looks. For this reason alone, working on your voice is well worth the investment, and particularly so if, as a speaker, your voice is your business.

One strategy for improving the quality of your voice is to seek out beautiful speaking voices in your life. Exploring the elements of those voices that you find attractive will assist you to move closer to developing a personal voice which you find pleasing and satisfying.



Exercise:

- ① Find a pen and paper.
- ② Optionally close your eyes.
- ③ Without too much thought, write seven words that come into your mind, when you think about your voice.
- ④ Next, listen to a recording of your voice, maybe your voicemail message, and repeat the exercise.
- ⑤ Take some time to meditate on the words you wrote down, and what perceptions might have led to them.
- ⑥ Also ask two or three friends who are prepared to give you honest input, to list three words or attributes each, that come to mind in relation to your voice.

You may be surprised to find that some things you don't like about your voice are considered attractive and positive by others. Accordingly, it is very important to appreciate that just because you don't initially like aspects of your voice, doesn't mean that others will dislike them! Your potential disliking of your recorded voice is largely a by-product of the discrepancy between how your voice has always sounded to you from the inside (through bone conduction first and through the air second) and how your voice actually sounds to others from the outside (through the air only). As you hear more recordings of yourself, you will develop a greater appreciation for your unique vocal attributes.

Developing a Voice Brand

Once you have your content clear and sorted, creating your individual vocal brand is the next logical step on the path to becoming an outstanding speaker.

A personal vocal brand is a unique tone and speaking style that strengthens and enhances your personal and professional image. Speak with us about developing an authentic vocal brand that is in alignment with how you perceive yourself, and who you aspire to be - tim@vocalbranding.com.au

Think about how much time, money and attention you invest in developing, managing and maintaining your visual image. You do this because you understand that how you visually present can significantly impact on how you are perceived by others.

Now consider how beneficial it would be for you if you invested some time and effort into developing, managing and maintaining your vocal image, and how significantly that would influence how you are perceived by others - Every Single Time You Speak.

Establishing a personal vocal brand, which elegantly expresses who you are and what you represent, combined with a comfortable, confident and composed vocal delivery style, will lay down the stable baseline on which you can layer your content, information and ideas.



Your Voice is a Reporter of Who You Are

*"...the voice is a natural reporter of the conditions, emotions, thoughts, and purposes (character and states or conditions) of the individual."
- 'Expressive Voice Culture' by Jessie Eldridge Southwick, (1908)*

In addition to the tones generated by a voice in normal hearing range, the voice also contains subtle harmonics (overtones) that the listener's body resonates and entrains to. When a person speaks, the listener hears them through the ears, the bones of the skull, throat, chest cavity, and abdomen. Indeed, we 'hear' them with our entire body.

Psychophysicologist Dan Winters has found that when people express feelings of love and compassion, their heartbeats change. In addition to other positive biological impacts, these compassion-influenced heartbeats also subtly influence the vocal harmonic overtones of the voice. Similarly, he has found that when we are disingenuous, there are discordant effects upon the heartbeat and this in turn is subtly present in the wave harmonics of our voice.

On a subconscious level, we respond not to the words, not to the language, but at the deepest level, to the energy and information which is intrinsic to each speaker's vocal signals and the resonances their voice triggers in us. This is the heart of Vocal Consciousness, the body language-like cues, subtly present in the voice when we speak, which can reveal a thousand clues about our thoughts, feelings and intentions.

Seven Voice Strategies for Vocal Brilliance

Strategy 1. Record Every Speech You Give

Record ***all*** your practice and live presentations, for potential subsequent detailed review, by YOU!

Undoubtedly, the best and fastest path to excellent delivery is to learn to constructively critique your own performance, and then improve it. If you can achieve a 1% improvement each day, you will double the quality of your performance in only 70 days.

At the time of writing, the most portable, flexible and convenient digital voice recorders are the Olympus DM series, such as the DM650. For recording a presentation you may wish to purchase a plugin lapel mic so the recorder can remain in your pocket.








Obviously, it can also be instructive to video yourself for review, but the substrate and core of the spoken presentation should come first. Once you have the words and your intention set, then you can incorporate gesture, movement and stagecraft.

It is interesting to note, however, that to a significant degree, the tone and attitude of voice follows, or is influenced by gesture, body pose and movement. So, in order to increase the vocal power of your speech, you should incorporate natural physical actions that support your message.

Strategy 2. Review With Eyes Closed!

Review your audio performances both with your eyes open, and then listen again with your eyes fully closed. You will be surprised how much more detail you notice about your vocal delivery when you aren't distracted by visual stimuli. It may take some focus and discipline to learn to attend to the sound when your eyes are closed -- your mind may search for distractions -- but the practice is absolutely worth the effort!




Some strategies that may assist in 'eyes-closed' audio review:

-  Close your eyes and allow three quiet, slow, deep breaths;
-  Gently place the palms of your hands over your ears, and hold them there for about ten seconds;
-  Remove your hands and notice the sounds in the room;
-  Finally, quietly say to yourself, "I am now open and ready to hear the rich detail from this recording".
-  Now play the recording. If your mind wanders, repeat the words, "I am now open and ready to hear the rich detail from this recording".

It can be very instructive to listen to the recording uninterrupted through to its end, just 'experiencing' with your ears, mind and heart, and not analysing or critiquing it. You may then, in a subsequent review, wish to experiment with pausing the recording, making a couple of notes, and then resuming playback.

'Eyes Closed' is also a great way to learn from other speakers as well. An outstanding source of free world class audio and video presentations is online at www.ted.com


Things to listen for in the recording include:

-  How do the tone, inflection and expressiveness make me feel as a listener?
-  How connected and engaged do I feel as a listener?
-  What things are distracting me from the core content? 'Um's, 'ah's, stumbles, hesitancy, harshness, breathiness, breaths within phrases?

continued...



 What do I particularly like the sound of?

 Can I hear a smile and passion for the subject? (if appropriate to the content)

Why 'Eyes Closed' Listening?

You may be asking yourself why so much emphasis is being placed on this technique of learning to listen with your eyes closed.

One reason is that by closing your eyes, you are reducing the quantity of sensory information for the brain to process. This allows your brain to give more focus and attention to what you are hearing.

The other reason is that when you are presenting live, you will be sending out multiple layers of information, and the vocal, how you sound, is the one which will subliminally impact your audience most!

In the unlikely event that someone were to nod off while you were speaking, they would at least absorb your attitude and intent, even if not attending to the words.

Humans become distrustful when they detect inconsistencies between what are often termed the Three V's of human communication:

Verbal: The message itself i.e. the words you use.

Vocal: The sound of your voice, intonation, inflection, projection, pitch and speed and cadence of your voice.

Visual: The posture and gestures, facial expression and eye movement that people see.

Your individual vocal characteristics and the way you use your voice alone, can have as much as 38 % impact on how your audience will interpret your attitude and how much they trust you and what you are telling them. If they are listening to an audio recording of you speak, your podcast, or listening to you over the phone, the importance of the vocal jumps from 38 % to an incredible 84 %!

Because people mistrust incongruencies in messages, you want to do everything you can to be consciously aware of what your vocal message is, how it is likely to make your audience feel, and accordingly work to ensure it is optimally in harmonious alignment with your intention, your words and your visuals.

'Eyes Closed' is absolutely the best way to develop these skills of advanced vocal understanding.



Strategy 3. Build Trust & Understanding through Sincere Delivery

"The voice emerges literally from the body as a representation of our inner world. It carries our experience from the past, our hopes and fears for the future, and the emotional resonance of the moment. If it carries none of these, it must be a masked voice, and having muted the voice, anyone listening knows intuitively we are not all there."

- David Whyte, from 'The Heart Aroused (1994)

In order to be believed and understood, and for your message to be accepted, it is important that you deliver it from a place of openness and sincerity. As already mentioned, discrepancies between the three V's lead to suspicion or a lack of trust by your audience.

It is no coincidence that the voice (mouth and throat) is found mid-way between the brain/mind, and the chest/heart. When you speak sincerely, your voice encodes both your thoughts and your feelings into an integrated, heart-felt vocal message. Consciously or unconsciously, people who are listening to you speak will resonate with this rich vocal message, which is a harmonization of your thoughts and feelings.

Emotions and feelings are largely indicated in the voice through the degree of pitch variation, vocal melody and subtlety of inflection.

It is true that there are people, even speakers, who don't particularly express their emotions when they speak. From the listener's perspective, there can be a sense of incompleteness, cloaking, contrivance, or even deception. The truly accomplished speaker shares both the thoughts and the feelings in a natural and coherently integrated vocal message. When the speaker connects with and expresses emotion, the listener knows both what the speaker thinks and also what the speaker feels about the thoughts being spoken about. That is a great foundation on which to build trust.

Hear Tim talk about the relationship between voice and trust
www.vocalbranding.com.au/video

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."
- Maya Angelou

Be Conscious about Your Breathing and Pauses

The quality of your voice is largely determined by the quality of your breath.

As a speaker, you are breathing life not only into your message, but also into your audience. Actively paying attention to your breath is a powerful way to connect your thoughts and your feelings as you speak.





"Allow a Full, Silent, Loving Down Through-My Body Breath" This is a speaking ritual recommended by Arthur Joseph. He points out the qualitative difference between a breath which one 'takes' versus a breath which one 'allows'.



Allow a quiet deep breath to create purposeful silence after you make a significant point. The meaningful pause allows your audience time to genuinely 'feel' what you are talking about and also creates space for them to integrate the idea into their understanding.

Some strategies to facilitate sincere delivery

It is inherently impossible to fake sincerity. A speaker either is sincere or is not. The following guidelines are suggested in order to facilitate a relaxed state where your true beliefs, intentions and feelings are openly expressed through your voice. Tiredness, stress, tension and nervousness can all get in the way of sincere and authentic vocal expression.

-  Think of someone you really care about. It may be a partner, a family member, a close friend or a child. Imagine that this presentation is being given for the benefit of that special person.
-  If you lose focus, or feel that you have strayed from heart-felt delivery, revisit your connection with that special person and resume.
-  Think about what it is you want to say, Feeeeel the emotion that you wish to convey, then... say it, with FEELING!
-  Before you commence, you may also find it beneficial to quietly say the following affirmation, or a variation which you find appropriate:
"I am confident, comfortable and composed."

Strategy 4. Speak WITH, not TO, the Audience

Communication is often defined as a process of jointly created shared understanding between the speaker and the listener.

No one likes to be spoken to, even if the person doing the speaking is clearly the expert. The audience is gifting their time and attention, and as speakers, we want the audience experience to be interactive and satisfying.

Vocally, it is desirable to adopt a conversational, relaxed and informative tone as your baseline, which will enhance your connection with individual audience members.

This doesn't mean you need to artificially create audience engagement activities (that is really up to you and your engagement style). It just means you need to be mindful that you are having a one-sided conversation with each and every listener. You need to ensure you bring the kind of respect and warmth to your presentation that you would bring to a one-to-one discussion with someone you care about.

As an aside, if you do ask your audience to engage in discussion or solo tasks (such as thinking, reflecting, talking or writing) always ensure that any background music you opt to play is completely free of lyric-based vocals; songs with words risk distracting and contaminating the free-thinking ideas of audience members.



In the early phase of your speaking career, it is your relevant and interesting content that will get you bookings, but in the longer run it is really the audience response to you -- entertained, satisfied, excited, feeling respected -- that will lead to regular re-bookings.

Strategy 5. Warm Up Your Voice

One of the most important things to do before your presentation is to warm up and tune your voice. Warm-up includes working and relaxing various body and vocal muscles, and performing breathing and toning exercises. A warmed-up voice has more resonance, power, versatility and subtlety, allowing you to vocally express ideas more richly and authentically.

Just as warm-up exercises for the athlete help avoid muscular strain and increase performance, so too vocal warm-up exercises for the speaker help to avoid vocal strain and increase resonance and versatility. But the great advantage of vocal warm-up is that most people find that it is quite fun to do.

When you speak, the sound of your voice is produced by vibrations of the vocal muscles in your throat - called the vocal folds or vocal cords. The richness and resonance of your voice is also affected by the level of relaxation (or tension) in the muscles of your tongue, jaw, neck, shoulders, chest and even abdomen.

As already mentioned, mindful and comfortable breathing supports comfortable speaking, so warm-up techniques also incorporate breathing exercises and breath work.

An additional bi-product of breath work is greater physical relaxation, coupled with mental alertness resulting from increased oxygen supply to the brain. Many traditions, such as yoga, consider breath to be the bridge between body and mind, thoughts and feelings.

The shower, the car, or outdoors, are all good locations to warm up your voice. It is important that you feel uninhibited and free to make sound during warm-up, so privacy is beneficial, particularly if you are self-conscious. If time is short, then at least sing along to your favourite music, to get your voice working.

There is a lot of information available on the vocal warm-up subject. One Australian warm-up CD I particularly like is 'Exceptional Speaking Vocals' produced by Michelle Bowden. Michelle has a warm manner and brings fun to each of the 13 steps she talks you through, bringing your voice to life before you deliver a presentation. www.michellebowden.com.au



Strategy 6. Smile as you Speak!

"Smile at the Dial" or "Smile at the Microphone" is advice that has been given to new radio DJs for almost as long as radio has existed.

It should be absolutely no surprise, but there is now research that confirms that listeners consciously and subconsciously can hear smiles through the voice alone. "'Open smiles' are those where the lips are drawn back, the cheeks are raised and crows-feet wrinkles appear around the eyes. ...technically this open smile is called a Duchenne smile, which may be the truest and most intense of all smile types". Such smiles involving the eyes generally can't be faked, and are more indicative of the heart and emotions than the brain and thoughts, so they will provide a stronger, richer connection with your audience. "Smiling affects how we speak, to the point that listeners can actually identify the type of smile based on sound alone, according to a new study that also determined some people have 'smilier' voices overall than others."

<http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2008/01/03/smile-communication.html?dcitc=w19-502-ak-0000>

For the best balance of voice quality and expression, your smile should be warm and open, but definitely not overdone!

Of course, you may have content that it is inappropriate to deliver with a smile. In most cases, however, your smile unequivocally demonstrates your love for your topic, and **your** love and passion are contagious.

"The smile is the signature of the soul; make sure yours are great ones." - Tim Noonan

Strategy 7. Play your Instrument and Express your Passion!

Your voice truly is your natural in-built musical instrument. In order to master a musical instrument, such as the cello, you need to apply yourself, be guided by others, practice, and listen to others who are skilled in the same instrument. Ultimately, you do all those preparatory things for one key reason -- so you can Play.

As speakers, we are actually paid to play. To play is to have fun, to revel in and enjoy an activity. We are in the enviable position to be able to use our in-built musical instruments - our voices - to share ideas and information with others. The educational literature abounds with research that tells us that people learn best when they are having fun. Clearly, the best way for your audience to have fun as they learn is for them to hear, and share in the fun you create through your voice and the joy that you bring to your topic.

Perhaps your topic is more resonant to the minor keys of sadness, challenges, striving or self-reflection. In those instances, play your vocal instrument respectfully, authentically and sensitively in those more melancholic modes, in order to strike the appropriate chords of awareness and empathy with your audience.



In Closing

As a professional speaker, your voice is absolutely the number one key to your business success. But even more than this, your voice is your quintessential instrument of communication and authentic self-expression.

When you sincerely engage your heart, not just your mind, you unlock your inner potential to transform your unique knowledge and experiences into the gift of true wisdom.

*So when next you speak:
Think about what it is you want to say;
Feeeel the emotion you wish to convey;
then... say it, with Feeling.*

About the Author



"Inspiring, insightful, entertaining and charming..."

Tim Noonan breathes life and joy into his conference keynotes and after-dinner presentations. He will take you on an enchanting journey of rediscovery into the power and mystery inherent in your own voice, and the voices around you. Every single voice tells its own unique and elaborate story, if only you know how to listen for it.

Tim's 'Vocal Consciousness' approach of expressive speaking and insightful listening arose from a lifelong study of the human voice. As a person blind from birth, Tim has learnt to listen for countless vocal cues that reveal so much more than the casual listener, and even the speaker, are aware of; and once enlightened, your way of speaking and listening can change forever.

Tim Noonan is a voice consultant and lecturer, inspirational conference speaker and the founder of Vocal Branding Australia.

An innovator in voice-based communication, Tim coaches individuals, speakers and voice artists in presentation skills and authentic vocal self-expression, as well as consulting to speakers and organisations to assist them develop natural and memorable vocal brands.



Tim runs a variety of unique Voice Communication courses and seminars including:

- > Say "I Love You": Finding, and Falling in Love with Your Voice!
- > Vocal Branding: Integrating Vivid Voice Brands into Your Business
- > Fully Engaged & Listening: Convening highly effective Teleconferences
- > Seeing Beyond The Suit: Vocal Consciousness-based interviewing techniques
- > What Are You Really Saying?: Reading Body Language with your Ears
- > Say It Like You Believe It! Manifesting through Creative Vocalisation

Tim has a degree in Cognitive Psychology and Education, with a particular focus on how people process and comprehend spoken information. Over the last 20 years he has blended his interests in information, technology and speech, to bring printed and online information to life for people who are blind or print disabled, by transforming it into spoken word audio. Tim also works as an auditory user interface consultant, designing and enhancing automated telephone services and directing voice-over artists in the studio.

Tim has delivered presentations to organizations including Westpac, ING Bank, St.George Bank, The Australian Bankers' Association, Optus, Telstra, The Australian Electoral Commission, Naked Communications, The Communications Council, Vision Australia, The Australian Tax Office and The Experiential Marketing Summit.

'Vocal Essence' Newsletter

'Vocal Essence' is a brief, occasional email newsletter with practical tips, pointers and information relating to the human voice and spoken communication.

If you'd like to receive the 'Vocal Essence' newsletter, please visit:
www.vocalbranding.com.au/vocal-essence

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