

Chapter 1

Having a Great Voice

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering what your voice has to offer
 - ▶ Finding out about voice coaching
 - ▶ Identifying the qualities of the best voices
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When you imagine a great voice, what springs to mind? A beautifully touching scene in a romantic film? A charismatic leader addressing an enraptured audience? A business leader skilfully persuading the board? A parent reading a bed-time story to a child? What a difference having an inspiring voice makes in all these scenarios!

Maybe you picked up this book because you don't like your voice. Many people feel this way for different reasons. Perhaps you dislike your accent or your tone, your lack of volume or the fact that speaking causes you physical problems. Maybe you're curious because currently you take your voice for granted and assume that you're stuck with what you've got, even if you don't particularly like the way you sound. Maybe you know in your heart of hearts that you can speak confidently and effectively – if you just had some advice from a seasoned professional?

Well, you've come to the right place! Your voice matters. It has a big impact on other people. Each time you open your mouth, you can have a profound influence on your success in personal relationships and in your career. Developing your voice is one of the most useful things you can do to improve your prospects in many different arenas. And you *can* change your voice.



In this chapter, you discover what a radical difference developing your voice makes – in terms of your impact, relationships, job opportunities and more. You find out what voice characteristics constitute a great voice and look at how you can acquire those characteristics for yourself.

Your voice as your calling card

Your voice tells people a lot about you – more even than how you look or what you wear. People hear your voice and make immediate assumptions and snap judgements about you.

Do any of the following statements sound familiar?

- ✓ 'He doesn't sound like leadership material to me.'
- ✓ 'I'm sure that she liked it – she sounded really pleased.'

✓ 'He despises me; you can just hear it in the way he talks to me.'

✓ 'She doesn't sound authoritative enough to convince people.'

Are people coming to the right conclusions about you when they hear you? If not, it's enormously worthwhile to do something about it. Although many activities in this book are, on the surface, about technique, most have a deeper purpose – bringing your sound and your meaning together in order to have the greatest impact possible.

Trumpeting the Voice

Everyone has a voice, and your voice is your golden opportunity. Your voice is the strongest communication tool you have – *if* it's working for you as you intend.



When I say *voice*, I'm talking actual sounds, not the words you may say. Think about voices you've heard. Just the sheer tone of a voice can irritate you to death, melt your whole being or make your soul soar – you don't even need to understand the speaker's language to feel his or her meaning in your very depths!



The effect of a voice can be devastating. The post office worker who took the fateful warning call before the Birmingham pub bombings in 1974 can still clearly remember the voice of the man at the other end of the phone almost four decades later. 'The way he spoke it was as if he had a grudge against me personally,' he says. 'There was hatred.'

On the other hand, ask someone to describe the person they love, and many times you hear, 'I just love to listen to him,' or 'She has the most beautiful voice.' Something about the voice reaches the innermost recesses of your being and works its magic.

I often refer to the voice as an instrument, but really, having a voice is more like having a whole orchestra, the possibilities are so varied. So if your voice sounds permanently like a strident cornet or a squeaky flute, you're missing out on the other instruments of your voice orchestra – all those other possibilities of expression that can affect people in different ways.

Exploring the power of your voice

Your impressions of others are bound up with how they sound. People's voices impress deeply. They're a living part of who they are and give clues to their character, values, attitudes and current state of mind.

Like everyone else, your tone of voice has the power to lift people up or put them down.

- ✓ As a manager, you can intimidate others with your voice – or make them appreciate your support.
- ✓ As a caregiver, you can frighten or stress other people – or give them such peace of mind that they feel better just being near you.
- ✓ As a leader, you can energise your troops so that they follow you into battle – or so demotivate them that they want to get rid of you.
- ✓ As a teacher or parent, you can give children the confidence to achieve their highest potential – or you can strip them of all belief and self-respect.
- ✓ As a coach, you can use your voice to call others to action, to encourage reflective thinking or to open the way to feeling and emotion – or your voice can sound oppressive and sap others of confidence.

The poet Henry Longfellow said, 'The human voice is the organ of the soul.' Sometimes the living sound of a voice stays with you long after the person speaks. With your voice you have the glorious potential to persuade, to influence and inspire; to woo someone, to affect people deeply or to make their hearts rejoice.

Reaping the rewards of a great voice

I contend that sound matters today more than ever. People who speak easily and well seem to get more opportunities in life. Their words flow and people warm to them. You don't often find a corporate chief executive or senior politician today with an inadequate voice. The rapid political rise of Barack Obama, David Cameron and other prominent politicians started and flourished with brilliant speeches. Look at the popularity of interviewers with the gift of the gab, like Jonathan Ross or Ellen DeGeneres. Note the respect given to anchors who are interesting to listen to, such as Walter Cronkite and Diane Sawyer.

No one can avoid the spoken word. More talking than ever goes on in the workplace – team meetings, conference calls and presentations; offices are arranged open plan for all-day constant communication. Jobs are more vocally demanding. This is the age of the sound bite. You need to sound good.



Former United States Secretary of State Colin Powell, who came from a humble background in the Bronx, claims in his autobiography that working on public speaking early on in his career made all the difference to his success in public life. He committed to becoming a persuasive public speaker and developing his abilities to connect with people and speak from the heart. He was noticed for promotion because he spoke well. His life story shows you not only that effective public speaking brings success, but also that not all great speakers are born. You can make the effort to discover how to do it well.

Powell is by no means the first person whose rise to high office was facilitated by his skill in public speaking. It has been a constant pattern through the centuries. Even 2000 years ago, Cicero, though not from the leading class, rose to the exalted rank of consul of the Roman Empire through the power of his speeches (see Chapter 8). From that time to this, eloquence continues to be an important factor in political success.



Just for curiosity, invent an image of Sir Winston Churchill giving his war-time speeches in a tight little head voice. Absurd, isn't it? The voice *does* matter.



The voice is an integral part of the whole message. In every great speech, the voice brings the message alive and gives it its grandeur. When you speak to someone professionally in a confident voice, they take you seriously. When someone says, 'I love you' in a heartfelt voice, the sound can make the stars shine brighter.

Making small changes for big impact

You may understand that a voice can have a big impact on people but doubt that changing or improving *yours* is possible. You've lived with your voice for a long time, and now it may feel as comfortable as an old shoe. Your family and friends may all speak in the same way. Perhaps by now your voice feels so much part of who you are that you can't imagine how to change it.

Let me encourage you here. You only have to make minor changes to how you speak in order to enjoy big rewards. For example, if your voice sounds just a little bit stronger, other people begin to see you as a stronger person, and then you feel stronger in yourself and begin to act stronger – before you know it, people are treating you with more respect than before. The same cycle plays out when your voice sounds a little more positive, empathetic, caring or genuine. Slight changes bring big results in terms of the impact you have on others – and also therefore on your self-confidence and esteem.



Whatever voice changes you need (or don't need) to make, you can't really ignore your voice because it has the tendency to give you away even when you're trying to create a different impression. For instance, you may want to sound pleased, but the edge in your voice suggests otherwise. Or you seek to impress people with your decisiveness, but your weak tone suggests instead lack of authority.

Take the plunge to discover the power of your authentic voice. The following sections are a voice journey during which I show you how to bring out the innate power of your voice and how to connect with people so that they hear your passion, your empathy, your energy and intellect.

Enjoying the Advantages of Speaking Well

When your voice expresses fully the nuances of what you want to say, then you achieve real communication with others, and all your interactions become easier and more enjoyable. When that happens, other people begin to view you differently, and all manner of possibilities open themselves to you.

I take you through some of the principal advantages of speaking well in the following sections.

Being understood clearly

You may be surprised at the additional clout you have when people can understand you easily.

Mumbling is a sure way to give people the impression that you don't want to be there! It's as if you're saying, 'I sort of want you to hear what I'm saying; no I don't want you to hear after all, or maybe I do; no, no, I don't!'

When you can articulate clearly, people listen to you without strain, and beyond that, they engage with you. Chapter 6 gives you lots of advice and exercises for making your speech clearer and easier to listen to.

Being a pleasure to listen to

It's a wonderful compliment when people tell you that they can listen to you for hours because they love your voice. Getting your message across to an audience is so much easier when they're enjoying the experience!



The key to sounding good begins with breathing well, and Chapter 4 takes you through the whole process of effective breathing for speaking. A good breath allows the sound to *resonate* through your body, giving your tone depth and colour. Go to Chapter 9 for more about resonance and its importance for adding variety and engaging your listeners.

Tension is always the enemy of a good sound. When you're stressed or nervous, your voice usually tightens up and sounds thinner and tinnier. You almost certainly find that you sound best when you're at ease, feeling happy and content, in the comfortable companionship of friends for instance.



Ask a few friends how you sound when you're having a relaxing time compared with when you're more tense. Find out what specific differences they notice in your voice.

Feeling more confident

When I work with people who are nervous, they sometimes tell me that if they gained in confidence they believe they would speak better. That's probably so – and the reverse is also true. If you improve your speaking skills, you gain added confidence straightaway. Speaking well to an audience and receiving a positive response is a great confidence-booster.



Discover how to relax your body when you speak – doing so gives you a freer and stronger voice. I cover relaxation in Chapter 5. Additionally, slowing your pace increases your gravitas and gives you more thinking time too.

Until you try adjusting your tone or pace, you probably don't realise just how people's reaction to you changes when you speak differently. Your adjustments create a circle: the better they react, the more confident you feel and the more powerfully you present – which creates an even better reaction, which in turn makes you feel even more confident which . . . you get the idea!

Conveying authority

Your voice can influence people in many different ways. When you speak with a steadier and lower-pitched voice, you sound authoritative and people pay you more attention and respect. A high squeaky voice just doesn't convey a strong image. When you know how to speak comfortably in a deeper voice, the simple change in your tone can achieve amazing differences in people's perception of you.

Achieving the change is just a matter of adjusting your volume and speed, and pitching your tone of voice lower. Chapter 7 contains helpful advice on how to speak more strongly and steadily, and Chapter 9 shows you how to speak in deeper tones without forcing your voice. In Chapter 17, I give you a whole chapter of ready hints and tips for sounding more authoritative.

Influencing others

Voice coaching techniques can enable you to come across clearly and create a powerful impact. But real influence is subtler and takes you to another level,

where you discover how to make a close connection with people through your voice. Through connection people are attracted to follow your lead, and then you begin to influence them more deeply. Chapter 15 shows you how to tune in more accurately to your listeners and create closer rapport.

Influence also depends on the strength of your intent – your internal energy and sense of purpose – which I explore in Chapter 10. Strong intent allows you to influence people with a quiet voice just as much as with a loud one. This inner energy is one of the secrets of influential people that you can readily acquire yourself.

Technique tends to lead speakers to acquire proficient skills that make them sound the same as each other. Influential speakers who use powerful connection and intent sound different from each other – and much more interesting!



Listen to public speakers you admire. Notice how different they are from each other. Each one is authentic in their own way. That's real influence at work.

Inspiring others

Sometimes when I ask coaching clients what they want from our sessions, their faces light up and they tell me they want people hanging on their every word. Sound has the potential to do this.

You have the possibility of inducing positive states in people by the sound of your voice. One person's voice makes you feel warm and comforted; another arouses enthusiasm; a third induces a state of calm. This skill isn't the same as having a voice with a beautiful tone, like a charismatic film star. Of course, a beautiful voice may well put you in a good frame of mind. But more often, inspiration is about using your voice so that your audience catches your emotion and becomes fired up by it, rather than just having a beautiful tone as such.



Dare to express genuine feeling in your voice, and your audience catches the energy of your emotion and is moved by what you say. In Chapter 9, I show you how to use body resonance to express your feelings in sound. You also find useful material in Chapter 18, which gives you hints on how to speak with charisma.

Entertaining people

In public-speaking courses, laughter is rarely mentioned. I did hear a trainer once who announced in a highly serious voice that the only way to begin a presentation successfully was to start with a well-prepared joke to break the ice. But a single pre-prepared joke is not really the point – and right at the start they often fall flat.



Speaking is about entertaining people – or at least keeping their attention – *whatever* you’re speaking about. The key is your attitude. You want to give your audience an interesting and pleasurable experience rather than a boring one, even if you’re talking about serious or technical topics.



Make entertainment one of your speaking aims. Doing so makes you think in terms of *your listeners’* experience of your presentation or speech rather than focusing on how well or badly you’re presenting. As you prepare a presentation, ask yourself the following:

- ✓ What is going to make this presentation interesting for my audience?
- ✓ How can I introduce moments of lightness in this speech?
- ✓ How can I give my audience a good time?

A liberal sprinkling of the following helps:

- ✓ **Variety:** Keep people awake and interested by including a range of subject matter, pace, volume, tone and more.
- ✓ **Spontaneity:** Don’t be afraid to make an off-the-cuff comment and to react genuinely to questions. Dare to be real.
- ✓ **Humour:** You don’t need to memorise jokes or do clever characters. Just be ready to see the funny side of something (staying appropriate of course!). Some speakers are so buttoned-up and stiff that they don’t even respond to the obvious. Much humour just happens if you allow it to.
- ✓ **Enjoyment:** Have a good time – don’t bore *yourself*! Then other people will enjoy your presentation too.
- ✓ **Stories:** Use anecdotes, and relevant examples from your own experience to liven your presentation. Turn to Chapter 14 for lots of effective ways to incorporate metaphors and stories into your speaking.



See the audience as friends, not people there to catch you out. Whether your subject is serious or light-hearted, your audience wants to have an enjoyable time, so your job is to help them do that.

Connecting better

Your voice has enormous potential to create *rappport* with other people. Through your voice you can tune in to others, show them that you understand their points of view, reassure them, care for them, encourage them and attract them into your world.

- ✓ With warmth in your voice, you can promote relationships.
- ✓ With firmness in your voice, people heed your words.

- ✓ With excitement in your voice, they catch your mood.
- ✓ With calm in your voice, the atmosphere changes and becomes quieter.

The skill to express the emotional energy within you – your warmth, firmness and so on – in the sound of your voice can transform your work as a teacher, coach, trainer, business leader or parent. And it can fundamentally change personal relationships in every part of your life.

When you remember a heated or emotional exchange with someone, you probably remember the words that were said. But the impact of the words was due to the *way* in which they were said rather than the words themselves. You can say ‘that’s outrageous!’ with worldly cynicism, with laughter in your voice or with passionate venom – the expression is what carries the energy of the comment, giving it the power to sooth or wound.

Chapter 9 takes you through ways to vary your voice with different tones. Take note of the ‘heart voice’ in Chapter 9, which shows you how to express genuine personal connection in your voice. You may also find Chapter 15 useful for discovering how to tune in to other people subtly with your voice.

Finding Out about Voice Coaching

The most obvious way to develop your voice is through voice coaching, and I am your personal voice coach throughout this book.

A voice coach may also be called a voice trainer or teacher, and all three terms are sometimes used for singing coaching. The old word for spoken voice coaching was ‘elocution’, which focused on getting students to pronounce words clearly and ‘correctly’ by reciting poetry with ‘correct’ pronunciation.

Voice coaching today is different. Instead of spending most effort on accent and articulation, a voice coach today focuses on liberating your natural voice (see the following section) in order to give you power and fluency. Politicians and those in public life have used voice coaches for this purpose for many decades. The practice used to be a well-kept secret. Voice coaching seemed unusual and even a bit shameful. Indeed, King George VI’s voice coaching has caught the public’s attention now because of the successful film, *The King’s Speech*, but at the time the establishment hid from the public the fact that the King was being coached. (See Chapter 13 for more on King George and his coach Lionel Logue.)

Voice coaching has become respectable and remarkably common. Many people in the public eye – Princess Diana and David Beckham, as just two examples – received voice coaching. Numerous politicians from John Kennedy and Hillary Clinton to Margaret Thatcher and John Major have worked with voice coaches too. Politicians regularly have coaching to create the impact they need in conference speeches and on other important occasions.

Discovering your natural voice

There's voice coaching and voice coaching! You can learn from a coach or a book how to speak loudly and strongly and even have people admire your voice after your efforts, but that is not what gives your voice a powerful impact on people. The way to an influential voice is through discovering and developing your *natural voice* – the voice you were born to have before you developed the habits of constricting and contorting your voice in various ways through life's ups and downs.



Your voice is unique, and as you develop your voice, you need to maintain the qualities that make it a true expression of you. Discovering your natural voice is about finding the accurate audible expression of your inner intention, including its thinking, feeling and unique energy. If you want to achieve a natural, authentic voice, your mind, emotion and body need to all work in harmony, and this harmonisation is what a voice coach can help you to do.

Facing the challenge

Unlike the simple elocution task of just pronouncing your words properly, voice coaching is all-encompassing and, sometimes, emotional work. Voice sounds remain stored in your sub-conscious, and at times, speaking can stir up emotional – even painful – memories. At the same time, recovering freedom in your voice changes your whole feeling about yourself, in a positive way that is wonderfully liberating.



John, a middle-aged retail manager, came to me for voice coaching with a constricted, buttoned-up voice and expressed his desire to speak freely and expressively. In our sessions, the very first time he relaxed enough to produce a freer voice, he suddenly became tearful. He told me that the experience of speaking more freely, though pleasurable in itself, had awakened a memory of life at home when he was young. He remembered that every time he got excited and burst out with a spontaneous loud comment, his father would tell him that he was tedious and stupid. So he learned not to speak with joy or enthusiasm. This realisation of the origin of his vocal difficulties was an important turning point for him in his voice coaching, and he went on to develop a rich and expressive speaking voice. 'It's not only my voice that's changed; I'm a changed man in every way!', he said to me with satisfaction.

The journey of working on your voice is a highly practical one, and its main ingredients (which I explore in various chapters) include:

- ✓ Discovering good breath control to make your voice expressive and resilient (Chapter 4)
- ✓ Releasing the tensions that can block the breath (Chapter 5)
- ✓ Making your speech clear and distinct (Chapter 6)

- ✓ Investing mental energy in speaking loudly as well as quietly (Chapter 7)
- ✓ Adding emphasis and strong cadence (Chapter 8)
- ✓ Discovering the music of speech (Chapter 8)
- ✓ Exploring the possibilities of your whole instrument (Chapter 9)
- ✓ Expressing your feeling and passion in speaking (Chapter 9)
- ✓ Allowing your inner self to speak through your voice (Chapter 10)

You can discover much to improve your voice through the chapters of this book, and if you practise without straining or forcing you can make excellent progress with your voice on your own. If you decide to contact a voice coach, see the Appendix for tips and resources.

Thinking About What You Want to Develop in Your Own Voice

Before jumping into a series of voice coaching sessions – or even the rest of this book – think about what you want to develop in your voice.



Run through in your head all the times and places where you speak. (Yes, this task may produce quite a list!) Think about where you feel you lack something or are in need of something extra. Your responses may be entirely obvious to you, but often they're not. You don't have to come up with anything precise at this point; you may just get a slight sense on occasions that your voice is letting you down in some way. For example:

- ✓ Do you say something and then find that no one seems to have heard you, or do you suspect that people switch off when you talk sometimes?
- ✓ Do you get the feeling that people dislike your accent or tone, even when they don't go to the extent of teasing you or commenting upon it?
- ✓ Do you feel confident speaking in one part of your life but lack confidence in another? For example, you're happy to explain a system to a colleague at work but get tongue-tied talking one-to-one on a social occasion? Or vice versa?
- ✓ Do you sometimes say something only to have people take it the wrong way so you feel misunderstood?
- ✓ Does your voice let you down physically from time to time, even mildly? For example, you get too much phlegm or find you want to clear your throat.
- ✓ Do you find it hard to get your words out sometimes?

Jot down your thoughts. Your answers to the preceding questions give you clues as to how to proceed with developing your voice. Whatever your particular issues, working on the basics of good voice production helps you at the outset. The basics consist of breathing well (Chapter 4), freeing up your body (Chapter 5) and speaking clearly (Chapter 6).

After you consider the basics, think about the particular occasions when you want your voice to work better for you. The following are requests I hear most often from clients.

Getting people to listen to you

Nothing is as frustrating as not being listened to – particularly if you’ve something worth saying. Apart from being audible enough and clear enough, some people just attract listeners. Try doing what they do:

- ✓ **Speak slowly enough to be heard and understood.** Are you rushing to get your words out so they tumble over each other? Have a look at Chapter 7 for techniques to sustain a more measured pace.
- ✓ **Increase interest with variety and emphasis.** If you mumble or speak in a monotone, go to Chapter 8 where I explain how to add emphasis and impact to your speech. Chapter 11 offers a helping hand if you tend to mumble.
- ✓ **Speak in an adult voice.** If your voice sounds rather high and young, work on allowing your voice to resonate lower in your body. Chapter 9 shows you how.
- ✓ **Break into conversations firmly.** If you find that people speak over you, use a contrasting tone of voice to introduce what you say.
- ✓ **Have confidence that you’ll be heard.** This sentence sounds like a Catch 22 – if you knew you’d be heard, you’d be confident! Having confidence is about your intention and attitude. Find out more about it in Chapter 10.

The skill of getting others to listen to you is vital in the workplace, for addressing a meeting, presenting to the board, making a sales pitch, bidding for a tender and countless other occasions. If this skill is relevant for you, check out Chapter 14 on developing your public voice and Chapter 16 on developing a professional voice.

Working with your accent

If you dislike your accent or hesitate to open your mouth because you worry about your accent, take heart – you don’t have to entirely change your natural way of speaking to get the results you want.



At the beginning, your accent may seem to you to be the most glaring negative factor in how you speak, but it usually turns out not to be. An accent itself is seldom entirely to blame; rather, the problem is more often just some aspect of the way that you speak that you can change without too much difficulty. For example, if when speaking in your natural accent your voice sounds high or thin, or throaty or harsh, you can deal with those aspects of your voice production, rather than ‘correcting’ how you pronounce every little word and phrase.

Saying what you mean and meaning what you say

Well, of course you *intend* to say what you mean! Yet sometimes people get you wrong. They fail to take you seriously, or think that you’re angry when you’re not. Or they call you patronising when that is farthest from your mind. More than likely, they’re picking up something in your tone of voice.



One of the most valuable ways you can develop your voice is to ensure that people understand not just your words but the intention behind your words. Get your words and intention to line up and you can avoid an awful lot of misunderstanding!

Feeling nervous or self-conscious affects your voice, and you may sound squeaky, or you may mumble and trip over your words. Your voice also comes out ‘wrong’ when you’re too eager to please and put in too much effort. Some people make earnest efforts not to show emotion when they speak or play an artificial role, and as a result sound like drones or automatons. In Chapter 11, I give you strategies for overcoming some of these ‘gremlins’ of speaking and show you how to find the true power of your voice through being more authentic.

Developing a robust, healthy voice



Your voice is so important to you, you must develop it in a way that promotes its well-being. That doesn’t mean you have to wrap your voice in cotton wool. Your voice is fairly tough. Babies don’t lose their voices – even after hours of loud vocal exercise!

Singers and actors look after their voice, and if you’re in any sort of talking profession you need to take special care. Chapter 16 gives particular indicators for you if you work in a talking profession. If, on a regular basis, your voice breaks, your throat hurts, your jaw aches or you lose your voice entirely, you’re doing something wrong and need to do something about it! Chapter 19 offers you tips for looking after your voice and the Appendix has lists of professionals and organisations to contact if you have serious problems.

Becoming fluent

Most people aspire to be able to speak fluently and easily whenever the occasion arises. If you feel that you aren't fluent, the reasons can be physical or mental – or both.

Physically, lack of fluency is often connected with poor breathing. Shortness of breath can cause you to rush and mumble, tail off, hesitate, stutter and even sound confused. Good breathing makes a *huge* difference. Simply slow down and follow through with your breath (see Chapter 4).



Fluency is one of the first things affected by your mental state. As soon as you feel you're going to make a mistake or can't think what you're going to say, you find that you can't start to say anything at all! If this situation sounds familiar, my first suggestion is still, 'breathe!', but other remedies are worth considering. Slow down and take your time. With a bit more space, your mind is able to order itself. Secondly, use plenty of emphasis as you speak. Emphasis enables you to focus on the important words and remember where you're heading in a sentence. I give you a few ideas about what to do if you get tongue-tied in Chapter 11.

If you call yourself a stutterer, fluency may seem out of reach. Help is at hand in Chapter 13! I draw on some of the latest research into stuttering to give you successful strategies for attaining fluency.

Identifying Good Voices

Developing your voice involves technique, but technique alone doesn't give a voice its impact and magic.

What *does* a great voice consist of? I give you ten examples of great voices in Chapter 20, and they all have special qualities that go well beyond technique. In my view, a great voice is vibrant and alive and sounds genuine. It connects with an audience and creates a bond between speaker and listener. This kind of voice has a sense of purpose behind it. All these qualities contribute to a great voice and I explore each of them in the following sections.

The alive voice

An excellent voice vibrates with an ever-changing sense of being alive. A voice can be strong, loud and even impressive without being great. A great voice communicates through constantly varying nuances of expression – a slight emphasis here, a light tone there, firm certainty here, a suggestion of hesitation there – and in this way expresses a whole range of feelings and thoughts. The alive voice convinces, inspires, comforts, amazes, reassures and influences in turn.

The effect of a voice that's alive is that listeners feel they're listening to a person, not a voice.



At a high pressure event, Amanda had to report on a new research project in which she'd been involved. She stuck closely to her prepared speech with its accompanying slides, speaking in a dull formal voice, actually reading much of the text off her slides. Suddenly, the projector broke down. After a minute or so of confusion (and inner panic), Amanda, in her desperation, had an idea. She said in quite a different informal voice. 'Well, that's the formal part of the proceedings, and now I'd like to tell you a bit more about my own experience in our new area of research.' She then talked about her project in a conversational tone that drew her audience in. The topic was genuinely interesting for her, and her voice expressed it. Her audience found the presentation – and her – fascinating. Amanda had discovered something she'd never forget – if you want to connect with your audience, nothing compares with bringing your live humanity to the party.

The authentic voice

When you listen to great voices of the past, the quality of authenticity is one that always shines out. A great voice never fakes it. Listen to Nelson Mandela at his trial in 1962, or the novelist Toni Morrison's Nobel lecture in 1993.



Every time you pretend to be something you're not, your voice takes on a quality that at some level sounds inauthentic. If you're open, at ease and free, your voice reflects that. Then when you mean something, the sound of your voice expresses it.

Authenticity is a physical and mental thing. Your body needs to be relaxed enough for sound to resonate freely, but your mind also needs to be bold enough to allow you to be yourself. Being authentic can make you feel vulnerable, but the effect is for you to sound more powerful. In Chapter 17, you find useful tips for becoming more authentic as a speaker.

The connecting voice

Communicating with your voice is all about making a connection. You may think that giving a great presentation is about speaking powerfully and impressing people, and that's fine and good. But if you listen to the greatest speakers of past and present, you find that they have the additional skill of being able to tune in to an audience and create a link.

To connect with others, you need more strings to your bow:

- ✓ **Meet your audience where they're at.** Get a sense of their culture, sense their mood and through language, voice and energy meet them in their space. Have the flexibility to change your approach to appeal to your audience.
- ✓ **Don't hide behind formal language and style.** Instead, use current colloquial language and speak directly to people.
- ✓ **Speak to your audience personally.** Talk to them as if you're speaking one-to-one with each person in your audience. Tell personal stories and anecdotes that give the audience glimpses of who you are.
- ✓ **Be the real thing.** Let your voice be honest, open and true.

In Chapter 15, I explain how to tune in to your listeners and create strong connections.



Making connection is the key to successful personal conversations and intimate relationships, and your voice plays a big part. When you can express empathy, caring and love in your voice, connecting with others becomes natural and easy.

The voice that has something to say

A voice empty of meaning isn't worth much. A great voice has a sense of purpose and something to communicate. Listen to Ben Zander talking about music and passion, or Shukla Bose talking about schools for slum children. As a speaker, even in a one-to-one conversation, you have a gift to give the other person in your speech. When your voice works beautifully, it conveys the full message you want to share, and your listeners receive what you have to offer.



Think in terms of your intention when you speak. To uncover your intention, ask yourself:

- ✓ What do I want – for me and the other person?
- ✓ What am I trying to say?
- ✓ What's important about what I want to communicate?
- ✓ What is my gift in this conversation?

Starting Out

You aren't starting from scratch when you set out to develop your voice. You've probably had a lot of speaking practice before you ever pick up this book – a lifetime!

Collecting voices

Keep a sound archive of voices you love. Search You Tube for clips from television and film and create a folder of your favourites. (*iPod and iTunes For Dummies* by Tony Bove will show you how if you aren't technical.) Enjoy researching and finding wonderful voices. Make notes for yourself of what you like about each speaker. The more you listen to voices you like, the easier it becomes to replicate what you hear. After all, we all learned to speak in the first place by listening to our parents or carers – this method is tried and tested!

As you practise listening to other speakers, your listening skills improve. You start to hear more subtle differences in people's voices. Think of the whole process as a wonderful detective

game. When you're convinced by someone, listen for a firm chest sound in their voice. Listen to how the voice drops lower for words spoken with emotion. Listen to the lightness in the voice when the person is happy or excited. These variations in sound give you the potential to express yourself powerfully and authentically.

Include live speakers in your research too. When you hear someone you admire, watch out for the response of others to their delivery. Notice what gets a good response from the audience. Build up an awareness of what works and what doesn't. Try out the different voices you hear, talk as if you are that person, and take on for yourself the characteristics that you like.

So, before you go any further, take stock of where you are, and get to know what your own voice sounds like. You find much more about this topic in Chapter 3. Then you can look at what needs to change for you to sound the way you want. Keep in mind how you would like to be able to speak. I suggest one excellent way for getting to know what you like and honing your listening in the sidebar 'Collecting voices'.

All right, it's true: you'll meet the odd hiccup from time to time, those old gremlins of fear and anxiety, or feelings of helplessness or hopelessness. Part IV tackles voice gremlins – those personal blocks that get in the way of speaking to your full potential. I include accents in this part as they often present themselves as gremlins. Probably the most challenging of the gremlins is stuttering, and you find some of the exciting latest resources for gaining fluency in Chapter 13.



If at times the task of developing your voice seems daunting, trust that you will get to that place you want to get to. And you will.

Choosing your method

Voice work is an activity of the body as well as the mind. In fact, it works best if you get quite physical when you're practising sounds. Although your vocal folds, your mouth and tongue and even your thinking all appear to happen above

your shoulders, your voice's power comes from your main body below – from a robust breathing system, strong stance, and the energy felt in your body that gives power to the sound of your words (see Chapters 4 and 5).

Whether working with a coach or trying the various activities in this book, you can start your voice work at various points:

- ✓ Delving into the nuts and bolts of breathing, relaxation and articulation.
- ✓ Creating the flexibility to produce a free and expressive voice.
- ✓ Building the strength of your intention to speak and communicate, which gives your sound energy.



You can also start your vocal journey, from the point of simply enjoying language. Listen out for the music and rhythm of language that brings speech alive. Try out different rhythms and emphasis; speak loudly, softly, slow and fast just for the joy of it.

Finding yourself in your voice

The examples of great voices in Chapter 20 include actors, politicians, broadcasters and activists, men and women – and each one sounds unique. In developing your voice, you must find *your* voice, the voice that best expresses you. I explain how to find your unique voice in Chapter 10.

Speaking to your full potential is more than just getting people to listen to you. When you find your authentic voice, you're also finding your identity. You gain in confidence in every way, and know more surely who you are. Finding your voice is a great adventure, and I hope you enjoy it!