

*HOW TO DEVELOP
A POWERFUL,
CLEAR, AND
RESONANT
SPEAKING
VOICE*

TECHNIQUES MEN AND
WOMEN CAN USE RIGHT
NOW TO LEND AUTHORITY
TO PRESENTATIONS,
PERFORMANCES, AND DAILY
PERSONAL INTERACTION

by
CARL HAUSMAN, PH.D.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my book about developing a powerful, clear, and resonant speaking voice. This book is for men and women, and it's all about using your voice to lend authority to presentations, performances, and daily personal interaction.

Let's begin by clearly identifying what you'll get from this work.

First, as you're investing your time – the most important commodity anyone possesses – you probably wonder what qualifies me to create this course.

I've worked on both ends of the speaking business, as someone who makes a living with my voice and as someone who teaches and writes about communication. I'm currently a full-time university professor, and I'm the author of several books about communication, including a textbook on radio and television announcing and one of my latest books, *Present Like a Pro*, which is about simple techniques for improving public speaking.

Also, I've narrated quite a few audiobooks, am an experienced public speaker, and spent many years as a television and radio announcer. You can find all this with a Google search, so there's no point in belaboring it. Suffice it to say that I've invested a lot of time and energy researching what works for me and what works for others.

CHAPTER 1: WHAT YOU'LL GET FROM THIS BOOK

You've come to this course because you think a better speaking voice is important, and you're right. Fair or not, the sound of your voice – your tone, your clarity, your timbre – is part of that whole package of criteria on which people judge you. A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* reported about research showing that the sound of a speaker's voice matters about twice as much as the content of what he or she is saying.

But can you change your voice? Isn't having a good voice like being tall – you either are or you aren't and if you're not there's nothing you can do about it? Not exactly. It's undeniably true that some people are simply born with good voices, but even those “naturals” worked on their tone and delivery and made both better. They may not have taken a class or read a book (though many did), but if they were in broadcast they heard recordings of themselves, or if they were public speakers, they noted audience reaction and feedback.

One way or another, good speaking voices are usually *made*. They are made *better* by application of what are essentially some simple techniques.

I make my living, in part, with my voice, and like many voice professionals I've combined formal training with feedback I've received from others and with my own observations. ‘

One bit of advice that I'll give out right at the beginning of this book is that the simple act of recording yourself and playing the recording back gives you enormous insight into voice improvement. You may not consciously know the thousand little

adjustments you make the next time you speak after hearing yourself, but you *will* adjust.

Having said that, it's important to get some guidance. It's like golf – if you're doing something wrong, all the practice in the world won't fix the situation because you're practicing your mistakes.

On that note, let me tell you where my expertise ends. I'm not a medical doctor, nor am I a speech-language pathologist. It may be that there are medical issues standing in your way, and only a physician can help you with that. We'll address medical professionals later in this book, but for now, let me note that something as simple as acid reflux caused by eating certain foods can cause hoarseness or constriction in the throat. Some very simple tests by an ear-nose-and-throat physician can diagnose acid reflux. That's a problem I had, I cured it with a pill and avoiding a few foods, and I only wish I had seen a throat specialist years ago.

You may have problems with formation of certain sounds, or with the rhythm of your speech, or with improper use of your vocal apparatus. A speech-language pathologist, a professional who holds at least a master's degree, can help. They've helped me, and they can help you.

Again, we'll talk about this later, but my main point is that if you suspect there is a deeper problem, get it checked out. If you can, visit an ear-nose-and-throat specialist who specializes in treating performers. Do some Google searches and you won't have trouble locating someone in your area.

It's likely that you don't have some underlying pathology. It's probably the case that you just need to break some back habits and learn some new ones – and that's exactly what we'll do.

This course is divided into three basic sections. We'll start by looking at some fundamental and fundamentally simple techniques that you employ right way – quick and easy changes in how you breathe and support your voice, how to stand, and how to inject some resonance and carrying power in your voice. Next, we'll focus on breaking bad habits, including voice patterns – repetitive ways you structure your speaking – and problems with diction and rate. The course concludes with a program of exercises and methods for life-long improvement and protection of your voice.

I'd like to conclude this chapter by reinforcing the fact that how you sound does matter. I was struck by an article I read recently concerning “uptalk” – that extremely annoying voice pattern where every sentence ends with a rise in pitch. I've always thought that uptalk just kills a speaker's credibility and a survey of 700 managers found that almost three quarters of them found uptalk “particularly annoying,” and 85 percent said it was a sign of “insecurity or emotional weakness.”

Wow.

More on uptalk later but I think you get the point.

And the equation works in reverse. We all know vacuous Ted Baxter-type speakers who look and sound credible...and people believe them – regardless of the substance or lack thereof of what they actually say.

This sounds obvious but your voice *speaks for you. Literally.* It is your calling card in an increasingly noisy and fast-paced world. You need every advantage you can to communicate your point.

A good, clear, resonant, confident voice is an important tool for commanding the attention and respect you deserve.

CHAPTER 2: STAND AND BREATHE LIKE AN OPERA SINGER TO POWER UP YOUR VOICE

First things first: Take a deep breath and take a stand.

If you use proper breathing techniques and stand with the correct posture and you can increase the power and appeal of your voice. What we'll be looking at in this section is what's called diaphragmatic breathing and the body positions that allow you to accomplish it. These techniques are nothing exotic or esoteric – they've been used by opera singers and other voice professionals literally for centuries.

Maybe the reason that they're not more commonly adopted is that they seem exotic. For example, when you discuss the concept of “diaphragmatic breathing” it sounds as though you are going to completely alter the way you process air, or use a different organ, and that's not the case.

What you will do is use some techniques particularly valuable for performers.

I think I know what you are thinking: You've been breathing fine for many years now and you don't need somebody to tell you how to do something that comes as naturally as, well, breathing.

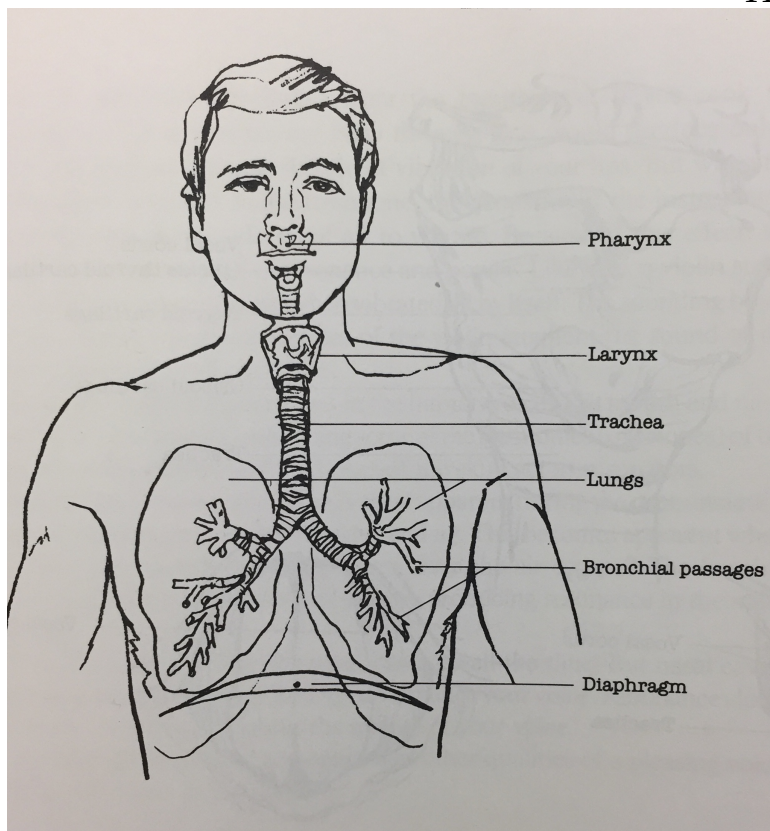
In point of fact there's a difference between what we somewhat condescendingly call “vegetative breathing” – meaning, breathing that performs the quite necessary task of keeping you alive – and diaphragmatic breathing. But all it amounts to is

more actively engaging that sheet of muscle behind the whole process, the diaphragm.

More on that in a second, but first let me clarify that what we are talking about is *nothing more than a method of breath control that gives you a bigger air supply and, more importantly, a steady flow of air for vocal support and power.*

So...what is this mysterious “diaphragm?” It’s a sheet of muscle that covers the bottom of the breathing area of your chest. Moving it down sucks air in, and moving it up blows air out. It’s as simple as that. If you let the diaphragm do its work you can really get some power behind your voice.

The figure below shows the basic anatomy of the diaphragm and chest area.

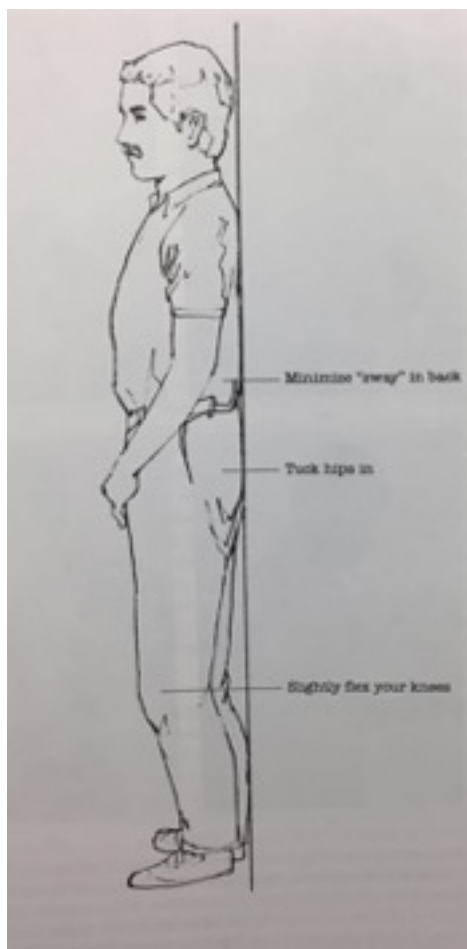


Where most people go wrong is that they equate taking a big breath with expanding their chest. But the chest is where the lungs are, and in point of fact they have nothing to do with expelling air. They're just filters to get the oxygen out of the blood.

Take a look at the picture. See what I mean when I say that air support figuratively comes from the stomach? Throwing out your chest is actually counterproductive because it diverts your attention and effort away from the proper area to expand – the abdomen.

Expanding the abdomen runs counter to our perception of the perfect male and female physique, but put vanity aside for a minute and just allow your abdomen to expand when you breathe in. I mean, *really* breathe in. Get a full tank of air. In fact, while you're breathing in feel your short ribs and chest and make sure they do not expand. Focus on letting the abdomen push out and down, and when you've got a full tank of air push up with it and you will feel and hear the difference.

An appropriate posture makes this easier. Stand against a wall and keep your back fairly flat and your hips tucked in, as demonstrated in the figure below.



Flex your knees just a little. This is a posture taught to me by David Blair McCloskey, a famous vocal coach who has worked with such notables as President John F. Kennedy, actor Al Pacino, and actress Ruth Gordon. McCloskey was an operatic baritone, and also taught this posture to opera singers.

Why does this posture enhance the voice? Simply because it allows for the freest expansion of the diaphragm.

There's no mystery here: Take much deeper breaths, allow the abdomen to expand, making sure you don't expand the chest or the short ribs, and push the air out from the diaphragm. Put your hand a little below the solar plexus and push in gently, aiding the process. You'll feel what I mean. And more importantly, you'll *hear* what I mean. Now that you know what that sensation feels like, replicate it. Practice it.

I know I sound like an infomercial salesman here, but I would be remiss if I didn't say, "wait, there's more!" But – there *is* more. Diaphragmatic breathing not only helps with voice production but also with relaxation. If you've ever engaged in any martial arts training you know that deep breathing from the diaphragm is often a part of the process. Meditation also involves deep, slow breathing.

Another benefit: Breathing more deeply and taking in a full tank of air forces you to slow down your rate of speech a little because you have to take time to breathe. Almost every speaker can benefit from slowing down a little.

And one more thing: If you take rapid, shallow breaths, you'll sound nervous – even if you're not. The simple act of forcing yourself to take less frequent, much deeper breaths makes you appear more confident. And when you appear more confident you set up a feedback loop with the audience and you actually become more confident.

So, let's put it all together. This is a simple, straightforward process. It's not always easy, because any new habit takes time to develop, but all you have to do is remember that your basic purpose is to produce a more powerful and more steady column of air. To do this, allow the diaphragm to expand. Don't expand your chest. Expand the abdomen. Keep your back fairly straight and tuck your hips in to allow for full, comfortable expansion.

When you breathe out, propel from beneath the solar plexus. To gauge the sensation, when you start out, put your hand a little under your solar plexus and push. You'll feel and hear the difference.

That is the sensation you want. The voice coming from a deeper place. Take deeper breaths. Don't let yourself run short of air. Keep the tank at least half full.

In sum – this is not an esoteric process. Just let that sheet of muscle *really expand* and involve that big muscle more directly in propelling your voice.

Next, we'll see how to use that power to enhance the quality of resonance.

CHAPTER 3: DEVELOP RESONANCE BY “USING YOUR HEAD”

The character that gives a voice a round, ringing quality is called resonance. A resonant voice is not necessarily a deep voice. You may remember, for example, Mike Wallace, who spoke in a high register but had a marvelously rich vocal quality.

In fact, let's take a minute and discuss the whole concept of deep voices. We've come to associate basses and baritones with famous male speakers, and to a lesser extent some people listen favorably to a deeper female voice, which would be in the register we call alto.

This preference for male basses and baritones and female altos may have come about by accident when deep-voiced announcers began to dominate the airwaves. But, as a side note, it's interesting to learn that in the early days of broadcasting a high male voice was preferred – it was thought that a tenor was the appropriate voice for cutting through static.

My point is there's no right or wrong range, although to avoid shrillness it's often a good idea for speakers to drop their pitch a little...something we'll deal with a little later.

But for now, simply remember that a pleasing voice is more a product of resonance than pitch. Resonance gives your voice that ringing attribute that not only sounds good but helps – along with proper breath support – your voice to carry.

We call this “head resonance,” and here's why.

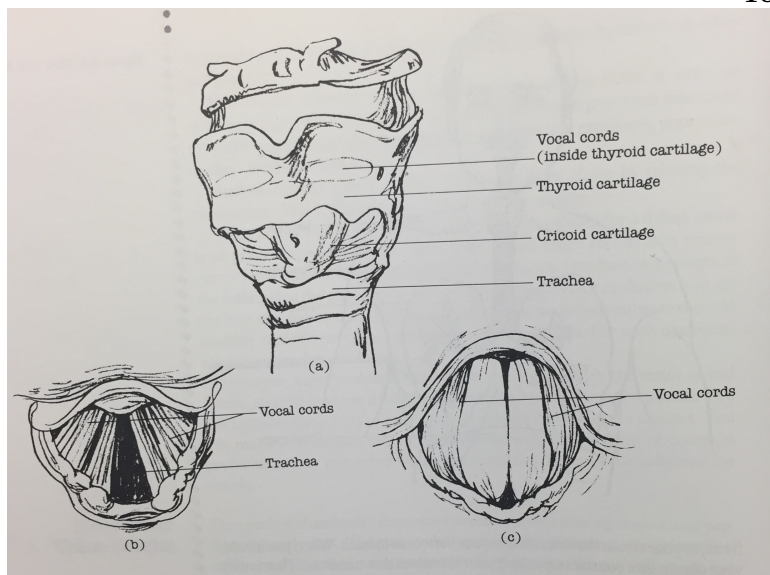
Your vocal cords make only a little squeak – just as the reed in a wind instrument, such as a clarinet, produces a squeaky duck call if you just blow into the mouthpiece when it's not attached to the instrument.

But when you put the mouthpiece on the clarinet, you get a very powerful sound, even without any of the finger holes closed.

Why is that? It's not really a function of length. We're only lengthening the path of the air by about four inches if none of the finger holes are closed. What produces the distinctive mellow sound of the clarinet is the vibration of a column of air and the instrument itself. That's where the power and the ringing sensation comes from.

A string instrument does the same thing. The vibration of a guitar string would be barely audible if it didn't take place right over the sounding hole of the instrument. The wood and the air inside set up resonant vibrations.

Remember, the vocal cords are small flaps of tissue. They're generally less than an inch long. You can see an approximation of what they look like in the drawing below.



Thicker vocal cords generally produce a deeper voice, but the thickness of the tissue is *not* the deciding factor in the quality of the voice. The vocal cords are like the reed or the string. To continue this analogy, you can put the best string in the world on a cheap violin and it's not going to sound much better. The same goes for a cheap clarinet equipped with a great reed.

It's the *total instrument* that matters, and in voice production, your head is the rest of the instrument. There's a lot of hollow area in your head (some people have more hollow area than others, a topic we needn't pursue in this venue), and those areas are like the inside of the guitar or the barrel of the clarinet. A column of air vibrates in your throat, your nasal cavities, your mouth, and even up in your sinuses.

When you do it right, you can feel the vibration in your head.

Sometimes this is called “mask resonance” because the area that produces the vibration looks like a Lone Ranger mask. “Head resonance” and “mask resonance” mean the same thing.

So – how do you cultivate that head resonance?

Start by humming. Use the breath support you learned about in the previous chapter. You can feel the vibration. Try to move the epicenter of that vibration – that buzzing feeling – to the center of your lower forehead.

One way to coax that sensation to the right area is to let a little more air into your nose. Air traveling through the nasal passages is good, in the right proportion. You do want a slightly nasal sound, although that term is probably the opposite of what you’re thinking. Most of us picture a nasal voice as what you get when you have a cold, but that’s actually “de-nasal.” In de-nasal situations, the air can’t get up in there and vibrate – which is precisely why your voice doesn’t carry and sounds muffled when you’re stuffed up.

It’s all about getting the voice higher up in the head.

You may remember an actor named Alan Ladd. He’s most famous for the movie “Shane.” He had a self-taught vocal technique, and he explained it this way: He said he “bounced his voice” off the roof of his mouth.

That’s a pretty good way to explain it: Get that voice up in the head. Let it resonate.

I’d suggest you go to YouTube and watch a little of Alan Ladd. You’ll notice that his voice is magnificent. It is clear, always powerful, and it is not very deep at all.

That's the effect you want.

Women should listen to Judi Dench, whose voice is a little on the deep side but actually gets its distinctive quality by being wonderfully round and resonant. Along the same lines, observe the ringing tones of Catherine Zeta-Jones, or Helen Mirren. That's the effect you want.

There are some other factors in resonance, and some techniques you can put to work right way.

One method is to slightly exaggerate the “m” and “n” sounds at the end of a sentence. Don't get carried away, but land on them a little harder and hold them a little longer. Actually, this is also a good technique for avoiding saying, “uh.” When you feel an “uh,” coming on, hold the last sound you spoke for a few fractions of a second more. Substitute that sound for the “uh.”

As mentioned, half the battle – maybe more than half – is keeping that column of air *steady*. You can't have head resonance without vocal support, so keep practicing your diaphragmatic breathing.

Finally, it's hard to be resonant and tight-throated and the same time. Constriction in the vocal chain quite naturally constricts the voice. Relaxation of the vocal apparatus is a topic unto itself, and will be dealt with in an upcoming chapter.

In summary: Hum, and practice centering that tone. Humming is great because it also loosens up the vocal apparatus. Hum, and get the sensation of that buzzing in the lower center of your forehead. There's nothing mystical about this – it's simply a matter of getting the open areas in the mouth, throat, nose and head more involved in allowing the sound to resonate.

Keep practicing, and remember to give every word a chance to ring. Slow down a little bit. Slowing down almost always helps diction and delivery anyway, and if you concentrate on each word the overall effect can instantly improve your vocal quality.

One great thing about developing the voice, as opposed to say, lifting weights to develop muscles, is that you're going to be doing the activity – talking – anyway. So use your daily communication as a venue for practicing.

CHAPTER 4: LOWER YOUR PITCH TO ENHANCE TONE AND CREDIBILITY

I've advised frequently against drastically lowering the pitch with which you speak. However, you may want to lower your pitch a little, and in this chapter I'll show you how much constitutes "a little."

You may actually be talking it a pitch that's higher than your normal range. Some people do this, and it often sounds strident, both in men and women.

Fair or not, some people do associate a lower voice with credibility. Perhaps some of this comes about from the fame of deep-voiced newscasters such as Walter Cronkite. And again, I remind you of the research cited in the *Wall Street Journal* showing that the sound of the voice matters more than the content of what the speaker is saying.

But having said that, I need to add an important caveat. You should never force your voice into an artificially low range. It *sounds* artificial. Also, remember that when you are at the bottom of your pitch you don't have any room at bottom for the natural up-and-down musicality of speech; if you're growling at the bottom of your range, you *can't* go down.

But most importantly, you can actually do damage to your vocal cords by forcing yourself into an unnatural register.

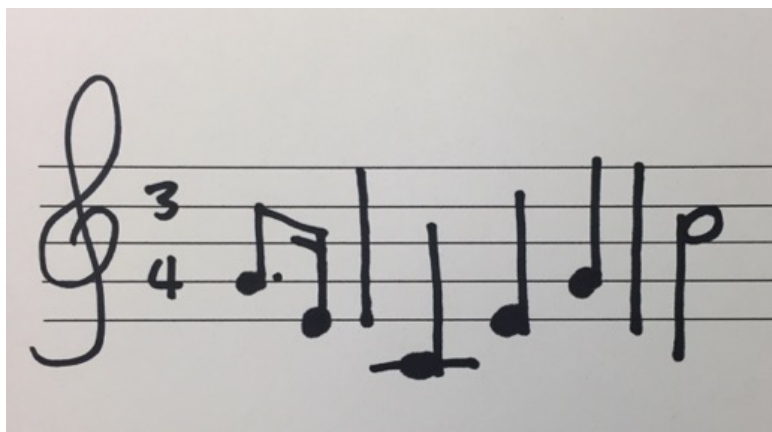
As we've discussed before, the "deep" quality of a voice is only one part of the equation for a pleasing voice, and a small one. You need support and resonance. Those are the important factors. A pleasing, clear quality to the voice is what's valued by the listener, what makes some voices sound better than others.

However, you may benefit from lowering your pitch slightly, so give it a try. Lower your pitch by a third, which I'll define in a moment. It's just a small adjustment. Don't try to sound like you're croaking out a movie trailer

Here's what to do: Start by finding your normal pitch; by that, I mean the pitch at which you normally center yourself. It's not an exact science, but you're certainly aware of the pitch around which you hover most of the time. You don't want to hover at the bottom of your range, remember, so let's start by dropping the center of your pitch.

Generally, what I advise is to try lowering your pitch by a *third* but no more than a *fifth*.

A third means three spaces on a musical staff, and a fifth is five spaces, which, unless you're a musician, means nothing to you. But luckily, the opening of the National Anthem gives you a perfect rangefinder.



The opening two notes, which make up the “oh,” are a G and an E – and that’s a third. The word “say” is a C, and that’s a fifth (a fifth down from the G).

That's it. If you perceive the need to lower your pitch do it by the difference in tone between the first two notes in the "oh," but not any more than between the opening "oh" and "say."

In summary, this may be just enough to favorably change the character of your voice. Small changes can produce big results. Do *not* go crazy with pitch changes; again, you risk sounding foolish or damaging your voice or both. A drop of a third is *just about right*.

A little more deepness usually helps both men and women, but it's only one leg of the three-legged stool you'll use for voice improvement. Again, the other legs are *breath support* and *resonance*. Those are the qualities that create a pleasing, powerful voice.

CHAPTER 5: ERADICATE VOICE PATTERNS

The first section of the course dealt with what you should do to improve your voice. This part deals with what you should *stop* doing – bad habits you should break right away.

Breaking habits isn't easy, so we'll start with something pretty straightforward: Getting rid of voice patterns.

Of course, everyone has some sort of voice pattern. It's inevitable if you speak English, which has a certain established melody and rhythm. But when a speaker's pattern of pitch and rate becomes noticeable and repetitive, it becomes a distraction and detracts from both voice and delivery.

You'll note that I said eliminating voice patterns is straightforward, but I didn't say "easy." It's hard to identify idiosyncratic elements of your own speech because the same brain that's listening formed the sounds in the first place. The best approach is to have someone monitor you for voice patterns, or, barring that, record yourself and listen specifically for those patterns.

If you recognize a pattern, you need to do more than eliminate it – you have to replace it. Put a different pattern in its place, preferably one you've heard effective speakers employ. Emulate the patterns of newscasters or actors as long as those newscasters or actors aren't parodies of themselves.

This advice will be a little more meaningful after we've described the patterns. The ones we'll monitor are *uptalk*, *downtalk*, *monotone*, *singsong*, and *whininess*.

Uptalk is, I think, the worst of all voice patterns. It kills your credibility. You sound like a character from *Clueless* and it makes you sound high-pitched and strident because you are actually raising your pitch at the end of every sentence. As I mentioned earlier, a survey of 700 managers found that a big majority of them identified uptalk as a clear indicator of “a person’s insecurity or emotional weakness.”

When a speech habit becomes identified as a moral defect, it obviously becomes a real problem. So, if you record yourself and hear a rise in pitch in every sentence, I’m going to give you the same advice as the doctor whose patient said, “it hurts when I do that.”

Don’t do that. End sentences on the same pitch as they started or a little lower. A question, of course, ends with a rising inflection, so a little uptalk is acceptable when appropriate.

While anything is better than uptalk, don’t go in reverse and wind up with one-hundred-percent downtalk. Downtalk, where you end everything sliding down in pitch, makes you sound exactly like a cartoonish parody of a newscaster. It’s not as credibility-killing as uptalk, but it’s still annoying and sometimes laugh-provoking. Break things up a little bit...end a sentence now and then hanging at the same pitch, and if you want to throw in a very occasional rise in pitch, go ahead. The key is to maintain a normal, conversational pattern. Listen to NBC anchorman Lester Holt, for example. Note how much variety there is in his delivery, and how natural and vibrant he sounds. That’s the approach you want to use to replace uptalk and downtalk.

Don’t go to the other extreme between up- and downtalk and adopt a monotone. A monotone, of course, is where pitch doesn’t vary much at all. You certainly don’t want to employ this

pattern because it makes you sound dull and uninteresting and it makes people think you find them dull and uninteresting.

Just to make this a little worse, a monotone can actually cause damage to your vocal cords, because keeping them fixed in one position causes them to contact at the same spot all the time and you can thus develop irritation.

The obvious solution is to vary your pitch, without becoming a chronic uptalker or downtalker. Again, I recommend listening to Lester Holt and emulating his tonal construction.

Do not, under any circumstances, overdo your up-and-down variation in tone, or you'll lapse into a singsong pattern. You will sound like a Top-40 disc jockey, or a parody of one. Also, people who talk in singsong sound insincere, and some sound downright crazy. So, go back to my basic prescription: *Don't do that.*

Break up those swings in pitch and also be sure to vary your rhythm, because sing-songers tend to repeat the same combinations of swings in pitch – stamping the patterns out like a machine.

Finally, search for and eradicate any tendency toward whininess. Whininess is very unflattering. Generally, it's caused by elongating vowels and stressing words at too high a pitch...such as, "I toooold you this would happen!" Shorten the vowels, lower the pitch, and maintain a deliberative tone.

Remember, listen to yourself and listen to others. When you detect an overly repetitive pattern, replace it with the patterns you hear used by people whose voices you admire. It doesn't have to be a network newscaster or famous actress. Someone with whom you work and strikes you as having a good voice will

do just fine. And you don't have to slavishly imitate someone else's speaking style – just borrow and adapt the things that work for them and make them work for you.

You can bring about an immediate improvement this way. By and large, distracting patterns are just bad habits, and you can curb them by listening and making a conscious effort to fix them.

CHAPTER 6: CLEAN UP DICTION, RATE, AND INAPPROPRIATE VOICE PRODUCTION

This chapter is about breaking some other bad habits, such as problems with diction, rate, and inappropriate voice production.

I again want to stress that if you think your problems go beyond simple habitual issues, seek out a doctor or a speech- language pathologist. Things like stuttering, for example, are beyond the scope of this book, but there are interventions that can help.

Here, we'll go after the low-hanging fruit: problems that you can break fairly easily or at least learn to live with. We'll be looking at *sloppy diction*, *accents and regionalisms*, and *breathiness*.

Cleaning up your diction usually starts with saying endings cleanly and clearly. Don't drop the final "-ing" sound and make it an 'in' – it's "speaking," not "speakin'."

Along the same lines, make sure you are not substituting a "d" for a "th" – saying "dem" instead of "them." If you have other substitution issues, especially ones such as saying a "w" sound instead of an "r," it's a good idea to seek professional help.

Note something important: If you slow down and pay attention to each word, sloppy diction will often take care of itself. Give yourself more time to enunciate all the sounds in the words. Slowing down a little helps almost every speaker with clarity and rhythm.

As far as accents and regionalisms, I will be honest that accents are often very, very difficult to eliminate.

And in any event, it may not be worth the effort. Accents are usually not a problem in today's world unless they are a barrier to communication – in other words, so thick that people can't understand you. However, there may be situations -- such as having Brooklyn inflections and taking a sales job in a rural area – where you'd want to do some simple steps at remediation.

In many cases you can't fix an accent by yourself because you literally can't detect it. Your mind hardwires that pattern into your brain and if someone points it out to you, even playing back a recording, you might not be able to perceive the accent.

I can offer you two pieces of advice. First, pay attention not so much to the specific sounds of an accent – which are hard to hear – but to what's called *prosody*, the patterns of tone and stress you use. Prosody is sometimes easier to detect and change than individual sounds. Compare your patterns of tones and stress with people who don't have accents and fix what you can. As an example, some languages have much steadier rhythms than English; in other words, they don't speed up and slow down as much. A native American speaker saying “cucumber” dwells on the first syllable but glosses through the second and third. Some speakers whose first language is not English utilize a prosody where all syllables receive the same stress and length. Secondly, compared to many other languages, especially languages spoken in Asia, English involves a great deal of pronunciation in the front of the mouth. Slow down and move your lips and tongue a little more; try to form more sounds with the lips instead of the throat.

The last bad habit to break is breathiness. It was cute when Marilyn Monroe did it, but it kills your credibility just as assuredly as uptalk. While this is something that can be caused by a physical issue (and if so, seek out a professional) it is

sometimes an unfortunate affectation or habit. Use your new breathing habits to eradicate breathiness.

Let me conclude with a discussion of diction and vocal patterns in general. Sometimes we're reluctant to change vocal habits because we feel like we'll come across as phony or affected.

This is a big problem. I know many people who have resisted changing their voice and speech habits for this reason, and I believe it held them back professionally and personally.

Let me answer this way: Speaking in public or a business presentation, or even one-on-one to someone in the workplace, is a different situation, and it calls for a different type of speech. It's exactly the same scenario as writing formally in a report – using words and sentence structure you wouldn't employ, let's say, on Facebook, or in an email to a relative.

There's nothing “phony” about using more precise diction in business or professional situations. Your voice is a tool, and you use it to achieve your ends. We all have what are called “social dialects” – patterns of usage and delivery that differ depending on who we are with and what we are doing. I speak differently in a public presentation than I do when playing golf with old college buddies. It's not being phony. It's being *appropriate for the situation*.

In sum: Remember what Yogi Berra redundantly remarked about “how much you can observe just by watching.” It's a simple process. You don't need anything fancy; just keep recording and playing back. A smartphone will work just fine.

Listen for those habits we've discussed, and work to change them. And don't feel reluctant to change. Using a different

vocal approach professionally is no more “phony” than dressing better when you go to work than when you go to a picnic.

CHAPTER 7: USE EXERCISES FOR RELAXING VOCAL APPARATUS AND IMPROVING AIR FLOW

The final section of this course will deal with strategies for maintaining and improving your voice, and in this chapter we'll focus on how to relax the vocal apparatus and improve air flow.

The two processes are linked, because you achieve your best voice when you have a powerful column of air moving through a freely vibrating vocal apparatus and a limber mouth and jaw.

Tightness is a big problem for speakers and singers. A tight voice is not pleasing and it's not really healthy either because it brings on strain.

You'll find that almost any voice professional uses some sort of relaxation technique, just like any athlete will stretch and warm up in some manner or fashion.

Remember, in this chapter we are not talking about general stress. Tension in the vocal apparatus can come about even when you're not tense in general, and your voice can be free and limber even when you're under a great deal of pressure. Maybe the conditions are linked – they probably are, to an extent – but they are not the same manifestation.

The goal of this chapter is to show you how to specifically relax the vocal chain and free the voice – let it become clear and resonant and backed by a powerful column of air.

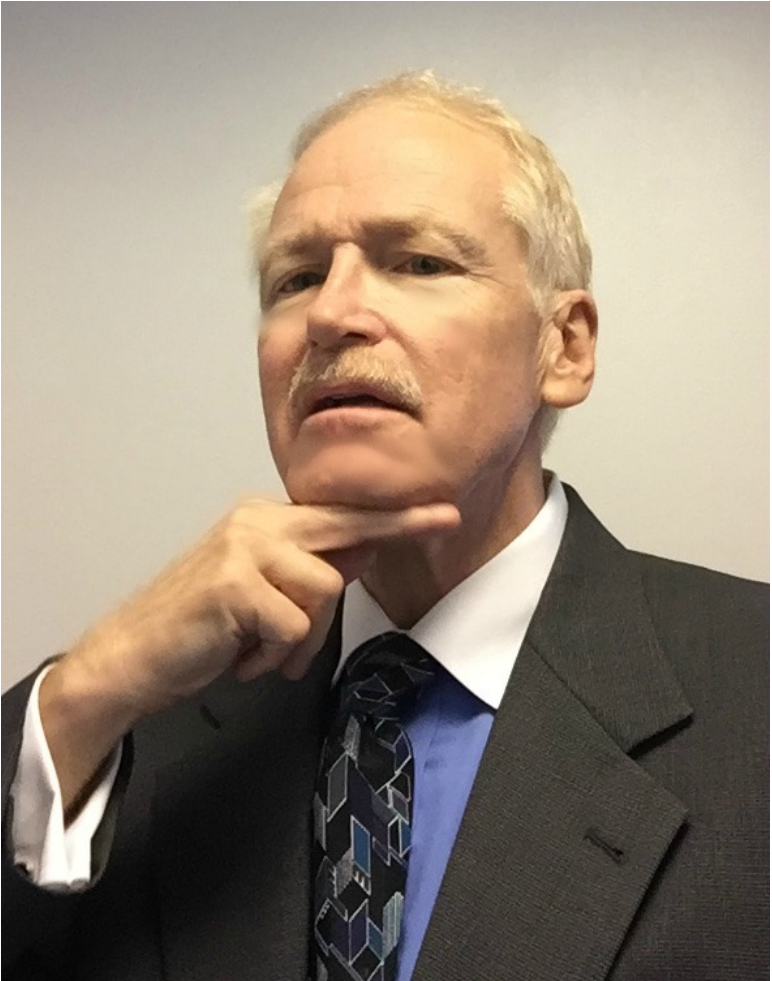
Start with the jaw. The muscles in this area can constrict the vocal chain significantly if they tighten up, which can be chronic because many of us clench our jaws unconsciously.

One jaw-tension alleviation exercise that works terrifically for me is to massage the jaw hinge. Just put your fingers at the hinge and rub a few times clockwise and then counterclockwise, as pictured below. Try this on different parts of the jaw.



Step two in relaxing the jaw is to bounce it up and down with your fingers, as depicted below.

When the jaw is really relaxed, you can achieve this easily but it is not easy to reach this state. Your jaw will fight you.



So keep at it. Hum or vocalize while you do it and keep bouncing the jaw until it moves freely. Do this several times a day. Make it part of your routine.



You can gently massage the tissue on each side of the Adam's apple, and on the underside of the jaw. Take it easy around the Adam's Apple for obvious reasons. Just massage gently and consciously try to relax those areas.

You may have tension in the tongue and not know it because you don't realize how big your tongue is. It goes way down your throat – and I mean way down. Try sticking it out and making it tense, then consciously relaxing it. You'll be able to feel the tension and the release of tension way down into your throat.

Finally, power this relaxed vocal chain with some steady breath support. One exercise to enhance steady breath delivery is to

take a big diaphragmatic breath and exhale for as long as you can through a straw. The narrow passage forces you to emit a steady stream of air, and when it comes to breath support, steady air from a full tank is what wins the game. A variant of this is to make a raspberry sound with your lips and try to hold it as long as possible. You can't keep that sound going if you blow too hard or don't blow hard enough. Cultivate a steady stream of air.

You might want to do these exercises on a schedule. Set up what works for you. Definitely do them before you give a talk or have some other extended period of speech. Don't be afraid to experiment by devising your own routines and regimens.

Always remember your goal: A relaxed vocal chain that allows for resonance and reach, and relieves strain on your voice.

CHAPTER 8: PRESERVING AND STRENGTHENING YOUR NEW VOICE

Improving your voice is a long-term process. Don't be discouraged if you don't get immediate results (although I actually think you might). Relaxing the vocal chain and cultivating good breath support is like developing any other skill or physical capability. You can't do it all at once. You have to make gradual improvements and you might encounter some plateaus or setbacks.

You want to maintain steady progress. And you do that through recording yourself and fine-tuning, keeping the voice free from damage, and relieving stress on the voice whenever possible.

Again, I urge you to record yourself. There's an old saying that you can't improve what isn't measured. Even though you are not physically measuring anything, you are gauging progress.

If you will record yourself and play it back your voice will improve – you will make improvements almost subconsciously. Why do television and radio announcers typically have good voices? Part of it is self-selection, to be sure (meaning that people with pleasing voices probably gravitate toward performance-related jobs) but all experienced announcers will tell you that their first efforts were substandard or even embarrassing. They got better by practice. They heard or watched themselves on tape and adjusted accordingly.

Record yourself every few days. Read a book out loud, read a news article, anything. Just record, listen, and make notes for improvement. Even if you don't take notes, you'll hear and

adjust. You almost can't avoid improving if you regularly listen to yourself.

Recording and playing back will also help you from developing new bad habits. When you try to change anything, it's inevitable that some steps will be in the wrong direction, and that's why it's important to continually monitor. It's true that it's never too late to break a habit, but it's also the case that it's never too late to form a new bad habit, either.

One of the most important thoughts I can leave with you with is not to damage your voice. For starters, don't smoke. I know this sounds obvious, but smoking is a particularly seductive habit for a speaker and singer. Something about smoking makes us feel the voice is behaving differently, operating more smoothly. Maybe the smoke coats the vocal cords, or just the ritual of lighting up produces some sort of perception of relaxation, but whatever it is, anyone who's ever smoked and worked with his or her voice knows what I'm getting at.

But in the long run, smoking produces mucus, which causes throat clearing, which causes more irritation, and of course the cycle can continue to the point where smoking causes death – which is a major inconvenience. I need say no more.

Another way to avoid damage: never use your voice for extended periods without warming up. Vocalize before you give a talk – some sort of random talking or singing. I don't think you need a series of prescribed exercises; just get the voice warmed up. Hum, talk, sing, do scales – whatever works for you.

Be sure you are hydrated, which is a pseudo-scientific way of saying drink water before you talk and during a presentation if you can.

And never scream. Seriously. Shrieking, say, at a sports event, can do some real and possibly long-lasting damage. If you do get carried away, or you're hoarse from a cold, don't keep talking. Your vocal cords are particularly vulnerable when you're hoarse and you can do more damage and prolong the healing process.

You can save a lot of wear and tear on your voice by using a microphone when one is available. They're available more often than you might suspect. Just ask and sometimes you'll receive. Lots of venues and even large classrooms have audio systems built in and microphones in a storage cabinet somewhere.

As a side-benefit, you can often use the audio system to get a good-quality recording of yourself. Many systems have a jack where you can plug in your own recording device. You can use that recording to monitor your vocal improvement and also market yourself as a speaker, if you are so inclined.

Some people don't like using a microphone because they enjoy moving around during a presentation or don't want to have to handle the device or simply because they think it's intrusive. There is something to this, which is why I favor lavalier or lapel mics that clip onto clothing and are often powered by a wireless device that clips onto your belt. They don't get in the way and they often produce a very good sound.

CONCLUSION

And that's what I have to offer. I hope you've enjoyed this book, and, more importantly, have found something useful in it.

I want to close by repeating what I said in the beginning: Good voices can be made. And while I know it's a cliché, developing a powerful, clear, and resonant speaking voice is a process. It takes time.

But it can be a fairly simple process. Combine performance breathing with techniques for developing resonance, lower your pitch a little, monitor and correct bad habits, and work every day to develop new habits and new focal muscles.

Keep at it, and good luck.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

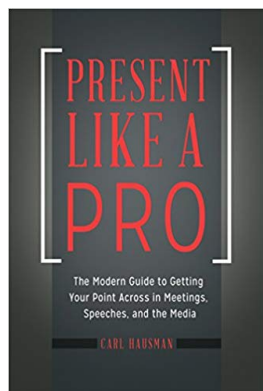


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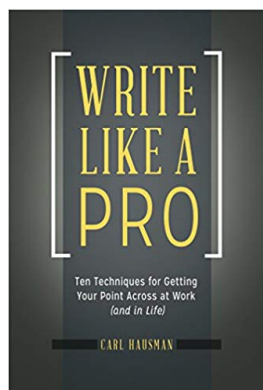
Learn more about Carl at <http://www.carlhausman.com/>

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