

Men's Health

Tricks of the trade and a role for our inner voices

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Over the telephone, your voice is at its most naked. It is almost as if you are putting your lips into the listener's ear, says Michael Kelly, a speech pathologist who teaches people to understand and use the power of voice. He says on the phone you can be closer to someone than you would be if you were sitting across the desk.

The healthy human ear is highly sensitive and with the phone amplifying your voice, all its nuances and hesitations are exposed — unless you are using a constructed voice.

Whatever the voice, Kelly says it's wrong to assume the listener hears it the same way as you hear it. This is physiologically impossible because we hear our own voices "in stereo".

While we hear our public voice pass through the air, we also hear ourselves internally, as the sound vibrates from our vocal folds to the inner workings of our ears. This inner sound adds a depth and richness that others don't get. We hear a voice full of texture and meaning, and they get a reduced, thinner version.

If you want to know what your inner voice sounds like, close your eyes, cup your hands firmly over your ears and count to five.

The absence of this inner dimension explains why most people dislike the sound of their voice when it is recorded. It is missing something and they feel it's not an adequate representation.

Because they don't like it, they don't listen to it, and prefer to ignore rather than improve it. Indeed, they'll leave recorded messages, never pausing to consider what message their voice is sending.

Kelly, director of Kelly Speech Communication in Sydney, suggests you listen carefully to the kind of messages you leave and analyse what, apart from the content, they might inadvertently be saying to others.

Studies have shown that among humans and other mammals, a high pitch signifies the mammal is frightened, uncertain, small or infantile.

High pitch is also correlated with politeness or subordination and when electronically lowered, the perception of dominance increases.

Kelly says a breathy voice sounds uncertain or effeminate, a monotone gives the feeling of depression and speaking slowly with dull resonance creates an impression of old age.

If you want to be perceived as younger, raise your vocal pitch and brighten your resonance.

He says most voice mail is ill-prepared, dull and can be difficult to understand. One word of advice is never say anything you wouldn't say face to face, because voice mail can be copied and forwarded.

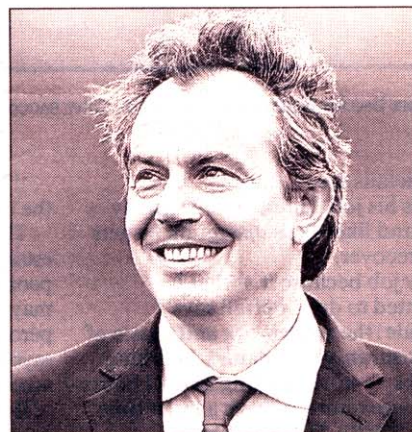
Kelly says because one's own voice sounds acceptable in one's head, many



Bob Carr: authoritative, clear, powerful, mature voice, no definite age. It's the voice of a man in his prime. It fits his role as premier.



John Howard: down to earth, small, measured but thin and flat, sounds around 55 plus. The measured delivery fits his role as a leader.



Tony Blair: cultured, melodious, sounds in his 40s. Statesmanlike, but would benefit by the occasional deeper pitch resonance.



Gerry Harvey: whining, nasal, edgy, forced, enthusiastic, sounds 45-plus. His voice doesn't fit with the traditional billionaire.

people don't bother to project their voice. Rather, they let it "dribble down their chins" leaving the recipients with an impression of ineffectiveness.

He teaches his clients to "own" the airwaves they use.

Kelly regards former US president Bill Clinton as the finest talker of our age. Whether he's making a public speech, being interviewed or just being recorded in conversation, Clinton is masterful, he says.

"He's never in a rush, he takes his time and he can make you believe that what you are saying is the most fascinating thing he has ever heard."

His voice is good, he's got the quiet assurance of a statesman and appears alive and genuine. Kelly says Clinton connects with people in a way that former presidential aspirant John Kerry, with his wooden, centurion voice never could.

Similarly, he says US President George Bush fails to connect. His voice is too intense and, with its artificial pauses, it seems scripted.

In Australia, Kelly's favourite political voice belongs to NSW Premier Bob Carr. He describes it as voice of a general, ageless and authoritative. The

low pitch gives it dominance and the depth gives it credibility, but it is still bright and energetic.

He says in voice terms, NSW Opposition Leader John Brogden has a real battle. He needs to retard the pace of his speech and use more "pause" gaps, lower his pitch and eliminate his peevish intonation. Sometimes his voice gives away his emotions because as he gets worked up, it gets louder and the pitch rises, making him sound strident.

It's not a measured and controlled voice like that of Prime Minister John Howard. Although Howard's voice doesn't grab your ear and could benefit from more energy and passion, it comes with a solidity.

When he talks, he doesn't move around, he looks right at the interviewer and makes few gestures. His voice is "down to earth".

There are three basic Australian voice types. Kelly says there is the broad sound of Pauline Hanson, the ordinariness of John Howard and the cultured voice of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

"When I hear Downer, it makes me want to rush out and have Devonshire tea with him," Kelly says.