

A word to wise: Inflect for effect

By Barbara Bradley
Staff Reporter

When a person stands up to make a presentation, three channels carry the message, according to William Rush, a Chicago voice consultant.

People form their strongest first impression of a speaker by his appearance, dress and grooming. The next most powerful signal comes from the way he speaks. Unfortunately, people get their weakest impression by what is said — a message often muddled by interference from the first two lines.

Effective speech is just beginning to be recognized as an important tool in business and industry, but one day it will be at least as well understood as dress-for-success precepts and body language, predicts Rush, president of William Rush Voice Consultants in Chicago.

Rush arrived here Wednesday to lead a voice workshop at the U.S. Jaycees Convention, which began Wednesday and extends through Saturday at the Memphis Cook Convention Center.

Rush has taught commodity brokers to yell louder, trial lawyers to persuade, salesmen to

sound sincere and women to speak with more authority.

Rush noted that the conversational habits of women can put them at a real disadvantage when dealing with men in a business setting. Women talking to women tend to listen and give each a chance to speak, but men more often fight for attention, hog the limelight and interrupt.

Techniques as simple as pitch, emphasis and expansion can help women capture attention and hold it, he said.

For example, in the sentence "This would work best," let your pitch rise on the word "this" and drop sharply on the word "best."

The last syllable of the last word of every statement should come down, he said. Women often fail to do this because they fear it makes them sound harsh. What it really does is send a distinct vocal signal that tells people you are decisive and you believe in your ideas. Lifting the pitch at the end sends the opposite message.

To give importance to what you say, each phrase should have a key word which you emphasize by raising the pitch.

Another way to emphasize a word is to pause after you say it. People often try to lend them-

selves authority by lowering their tone of voice — an approach Rush calls the Ted Baxter syndrome. An artificial throaty resonance will make you sound as pompous and comical as the newscaster on the old *Mary Tyler Moore* TV series.

According to Rush, the proper pitch of your voice is about five musical notes above the lowest note you can sing easily. Test your pitch by singing the musical scale "do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti." Look for the note that allows your voice to sound loudest without straining. This "best note" — usually sol, la or ti — will yield a fuller, more resonant, and more easily produced sound. It also allows you to fluctuate your pitch for emphasis.

Rush has no doubt that the way the candidates spoke during the last presidential election helped determine the outcome.

Democratic Sen. Albert Gore Jr. of Tennessee had everything — good looks, clear speech, energy, intelligence. But his knowledgeable answers tended to put people to sleep.

"His voice doesn't fit what his face and body are saying and that makes him a remote person," Rush said. "His sound is too cultivated, too studied. You can't trust him fully."

Rush is an adviser to Halls Mentho-Lyptus Voice Improvement Program. For a free brochure on how to improve your voice, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Halls Mentho-Lyptus V.I.P at 500 North Michigan Avenue Suite 200, Chicago, Ill. 60611.