

Chicago Chapter News



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Giving a Face to the Voice on the Phone

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Over the years, I have noted that most attorneys had a good sense of the visual elements of communication. Most have had firm handshakes, good eye contact, a sense of appropriate dress and seemed to read and use body language well. However, a rather large number had a less well developed sense of the appropriate role of their voice. I also noted that some attorneys were far more effective in a face-to-face meeting than they were over the phone. Some went to great lengths to avoid using the phone to convey anything important. They realized that their visual presence rescued their unproductive vocal usage.

On the phone, it is central that our intention and voice agree with our words. The first thing to remember is that on the telephone our voice is our face. As with faces, voices do not have to be beautiful in order to be effective. However, they must have a certain amount of affability, readability and congruence.

The perception of affability is most often ruined when the speaker chooses a pitch that is too low for their voice. This mistake is often made due

to the notion that a lower voice is more authoritative. When we go too low, we rob the voice of its ability to add a subtext to our message. That subtext which is in the "tone of voice", adds additional layers to the meaning. At a lower pitch, the voice may sound coarse, unfriendly or detached. The slightly higher pitch will add warmth and friendliness.

Readability is important if we do not want to foster suspicion and distrust in the person with whom we are speaking. A close visual analogy would be that of negotiating face-to-face with someone who is wearing mirrored sunglasses. When we are unable to see the other's eyes, we immediately become suspicious and make unfavorable attributions about that person's intentions.

Lastly, when our words and voices do not agree, the message becomes incongruent. The listener will follow what the voice says, rather than our words. Inflection patterns become important here because our listener cannot see our smiling face or nodding head. The last syllable of an affirmative statement, for instance, must come down sharply and cleanly in pitch in order to sound credible.

The following are some helpful hints to ensure that we sound friendly, knowledgeable and consistent. Find the lowest note that we can sing at easily. Then sing up the scale (do, re, mi...) five to seven notes higher. The most comfortable of these is the note at which our voice will be the most mechanically

and acoustically efficient. At that note, our voice will sound the best to our listener, have the least effort for us, be the most resonant, and send the most positive signals.

One simple test, for determining if we are far enough from the bottom of our voice, is to note whether the last syllables of our sentences can descend in pitch without "scraping". (A scraping sound at the end of a sentence has a negating effect.)



President's Corner

Why Ask Why?

By JONATHAN ASPERGER
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Are you busy? Does your phone unceasingly ring with requests for help in putting together presentations, seminars, press releases, biographies and mailings? Is it all you can do to keep pace with the daily onslaught of assignments?

That's good. Your clients (the lawyers in your firm) need you. They recognize