

Speaking out to speakers

By John Corr
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William Rush thinks talk is cheap, at least the way most people go about it.

But talk can be rich, compelling, pleasing and interesting, he says, if people follow a few simple rules.

"People seldom think about how they sound, until they have to give a speech or make an presentation," he says. "Even then, they don't *think* about it so much as *worry* about it — which makes things even worse."

Rush is a professional voice consultant. He teaches actors and singers to avoid wearing out their voices. He teaches politicians and lawyers how to be more persuasive, and he teaches commodities traders how to make themselves heard in the trading pit.

Rush, who has a voice-consulting firm in Chicago, visited Philadelphia recently as part of a national tour to spread the word about techniques for better speaking. The tour is sponsored by a cough-drop company.

Ironically, a big part of Rush's message — if heeded — will cause people to buy fewer cough drops because they will be less likely to develop scratchy, dried throats from overstraining their vocal cords.

Rush says his clients come in two categories — heavy talkers such as commodities traders, teachers, telephone salespeople and athletic coaches, and those who speak a moderate amount, such as business executives, salesclerks and secretaries.

For those who must talk a lot, he stresses focusing and directing the voice, allowing clarity and articulation to take the place of shouting.

"Commodities traders are the worst," he says. "They come into my office barely able to speak."

So, he says, he gives them a cough drop to soothe the membranes and begins teaching.

Rush, who was a singer, actor and musician before getting into voice counseling 20 years ago, says he teaches four fundamentals of vocal effectiveness — breath, pitch, articulation and flow.

"Most people use what I call Thanksgiving dinner breathing when speaking," he says. "Their posture is bad and their breathing is laid-back, even lazy. But effective speaking requires that you hold your upper body erect

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Special to The Inquirer / MICHAEL E. SAMOJEDEN

William Rush says people should follow a few simple rules to pacify their throats and amplify their thoughts.

A voice expert offers a few words of advice

SPEAKING, from 1-H and that you breathe a little more actively, about the way you would while walking down the street."

But don't take big, deep breaths just because what you have to say is important, he says. "All of that air will make your voice sound strained and will alter the pitch."

Speakers should determine the best pitch for them and use it habitually. They can do this by speaking into a tape recorder at differing levels until they find the pitch that feels and sounds natural.

Those who must speak loudly, such as commodities traders, can "sing" notes in an ascending scale to find the pitch that allows their voice to sound loudest without straining.

People also must concentrate on articulation, giving each word its full value. Clarity always is better than loudness, he says.

The key thing to learn about flow, he says, is to avoid using nonwords to hook your ideas and sentences together — sounds such as *mmm* or *ahhh*. Instead, pause. Pauses make a presentation more interesting, he says.

"If pauses are used properly, they won't result in the listener losing interest."

Many of Rush's clients are business executives and salespeople who are worried about making speeches.

"The first thing I tell them is that they are going into these things tense, and they have to accept that," Rush says. "Many people refuse to accept



Rush urges speaking into a tape recorder to test the voice's pitch.

this. They tell themselves, 'I shouldn't be feeling this way,' and that just makes things worse.

"Whenever you face a situation where risk is involved, your body is going to be subjected to the instinctive fight-or-flight reaction. Accept it, and deal with it."

Before beginning, he says, roll the neck and loosen the shoulders. Begin breathing at the "walking rate" and make a conscious effort to slow the pace of the presentation.

"Slowing down relaxes you," he says, "relaxes your audience and gives you time to organize your thoughts."

Rush says his politician clients mainly want to work on sounding genuine. Among other things, Rush tells them to speak with energy and some emotion, to "put some space" around

important ideas and, in preparing a speech, to remember that each phrase has only one key word.

"It's a matter of choosing the key word and emphasizing it," Rush says.

Even prominent politicians may need help with vocal skills, Rush says. Consider Sen. Bob Dole (R., Kan.) and Sen. Paul Simon (D., Ill.), both presidential contenders.

"They both seem to have the habitual problem of being flat. They don't emphasize properly," he says.

But President Reagan clearly is a master of speaking skills, Rush says.

"He's amazing. He can say some tough, even bitter things and they actually come out sounding nice."

A politician who managed to achieve high office without possessing the vocal skills of Reagan was Richard Nix-

on, Rush says.

"An excellent example is the 'I am not a crook' speech," Rush notes. "While he was saying, 'I am not a crook,' his voice and manner" were saying otherwise.

Rush offers this quick quiz to test your vocal I.Q.:

1. When making important telephone calls, teenagers often need to:
 - a. slow down
 - b. speak faster
2. To add emphasis to an important word or message, leave a brief space or pause (a) before or (b) after each thought.
3. When making a presentation, key words should be spoken somewhat:
 - a. higher
 - b. lower
4. In telephone conversations, women often need to guard against:
 - a. vocal non-assertiveness
 - b. sounding "pushy"
5. If you are given a sales script to work from, you should:
 - a. practice saying it aloud until you are comfortable
 - b. extemporize, putting important messages into your own words

Answers:

- 1) a; 2) b; 3) a; 4) a; 5) a.