



A common error among men is to lower their voices for more authority, says vocal consultant William Rush. (Staff photo by Bill Powers)

## The voice is the medium

Consultant William Rush helps clients sell products, selves

LORRAINE BANNON

William Rush dons a dark business suit to talk informally about his profession as a voice consultant. "It sets the tone," he says, explaining his normal attire for consulting sessions with businessmen and businesswomen who come to him to learn how to use their voices to sell their products or themselves.

The 43-year-old south Evanston resident, who started his professional career as a baritone with the Norman Luboff choir, has been vocal advisor to casts of "The Wiz," "A Chorus Line" and "Annie," and has taken on business types, such as salesmen, employe consultants and commodities traders. The traders do a lot of shouting in their work, but Rush contends he can retrain them to avoid misuse of their voices and help them to develop volume and articulateness along with giving them practical advice on throat care.

A master's degree from Northwestern University and several years of teaching 1st through 12th grades in public schools in Ashton, Ill., and Libertyville preceded his becoming a consultant.

**THE CONSULTING EVOLVED** from observations he has made for years on how people use their voices under certain circumstances. He recalled one of his former students calling to him across an athletic field. "Hey, Mr. Rush, How are you?" came through clearly from a young private student who normally had a quiet, almost inaudible voice. Outdoors she was comfortable, confident.

"I began to understand the personality behind the voice," he said. And he began to understand how behavior in a highly conditioned society affects the way people sound.

A common error among men is to lower the voice to sound more authoritative. Rush calls it "the Ted Baxter syndrome." Baxter's "Hi, Mar" (in the Mary Tyler Moore show) rings deep, adds Rush, but it's pretentious.

Men want to sound macho, and among traders "no one wants to sound like a wimp in the pits."

**AS FOR WOMEN** traders, Rush said, they "get a lot of hell in the pits," where they are often reminded, "You sound kind of squeaky, honey."

The right pitch is important, he said. Pitch and depth of sound often get confused.

Anxiety is easily detected in a voice and can often work against the speaker, he said.

One salesman friend tried time after time to sell his product to a prospective customer, who kept asking him to call back. With each call the salesman got more nervous. What was wrong, analyzed Rush, was that while the deal sounded good the voice was negating the information.

Rush, whose master's degree is in performance, worked with the leads in the musical "Annie."

"After doing eight shows a week there is the freshness fac-

tor," he said. "I'd sit out in the audience and try to keep the performers on the track vocally."

**VOICES REFLECT EXPERIENCES** and our reactions to them. "When anxious, our respiration changes, and there is a shift in sound. After strain is gone, one can create a new vocal habit," he said.

"Our voice is a calling card to the rest of the world."

People who sell by phone may send signals that they suffer anxiety when things go wrong. Rush's example of classic anxiety is having made no sales with the boss standing over you giving you the fish eye. In that case, the employe tends to become overly aggressive or pleading for a sale. "Neither method will work," he said.

Rush points out to his clients that anxiety is normal, but that it is important to recognize it. "Observe what is going on," he said. "Most people are afraid to feel fear, as a sign of weakness."

"Those feelings are information about oneself. Anxiety gives us clues. It is serving a purpose."

**HE ADVISES CLIENTS:** "Know your own reaction and possibilities," and remember that "mistakes aren't fatal."

His clients talk into microphones and listen to the sound of their own voices. According to Rush, most people say "I don't sound like that, do I?"

The benefit of his sessions, he said, is to impart a set of standards. And the first step usually is "slow down."

Advice such as "Don't be nervous" is the worst," he said, adding that it's like saying "Don't think of anything but green apples."

Among his clients has been Ruth Booker, the current Miss Illinois. Rush was her advisor on the talent and interview portions of the state competition.

Rush is reminded that many parents use their voices in the wrong way. There are two ways of saying "no." One was the kind used by his mother. "When she shouted 'no' you obeyed." Intention was detected in the first sound.

**THE "NO" YOU** often hear from parents that is not obeyed is a "no" that comes off sounding like "Gee, I'm not sure."

Uncertainty, like anxiety, can be detected, with the sound contradicting the words.

Avoid an out-of-control sound, advised Rush. People pick that up right away. Among his clients are trial lawyers who need to be in control, he said.

"When I believe in what I'm doing, I can convince others," is one of his messages.

But voice won't do it all. An example from Rush: "Take a salesman who doesn't know his product and is always tardy. He is the type looking for the magic bullet to make life better."

The voice just helps get the message out better. "It's one of our best resources" is his firm belief.