

FOUR EXERCISES FOR SPEAKING POWER

1

WHAT'S THE LISTENING?

EXERCISE 1: WHAT'S THE LISTENING?

We always speak into a listening, which changes from person to person, from audience to audience, and over time. If you want to hit the bullseye instead of missing the target altogether, simply get into the habit of asking yourself: "What's the listening?" both when you're planning what to say and as you meet the audience, whether it's one person or a group. As you practice, you will become better and better at feeling the listening, and at adapting your content and delivery to suit.



2

STANCE AND BREATH

EXERCISE 2: STANCE AND BREATH

Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart for males, slightly narrower than that for females. Ideally your feet are parallel and pointing straight forward: it can look timid to have your toes angled inwards, and inelegant or even brash to have them angled outwards. Now imagine a string attached to the top of your head, and feel as if you are dangling from it. Let your shoulders fall downwards and backwards, and feel your neck extend. Feel the relaxation in your arms and hands, which are hanging comfortably by your sides, with thumbs to the front. This is your neutral, powerful stance for speaking. Practice adopting this posture and it will become natural and easy. Now all you need to add is a deep in-breath. This will help calm any nerves, give you fuel for speaking — and for habitual interrupters it'll let you notice that someone else is speaking!

3

RANGE

EXERCISE 3: RANGE

To improve your range and conscious use of prosody, pace and volume, find a quiet place where you won't be overheard. Record yourself reading some pages from a book or some stories from a news source in your natural way. Listen and assess your prosody, pace and volume. How much life and variability is there in your speaking? Do you have any repetitive cadences or habitual prosodies?



Now play with prosody: record another take with almost no prosody at all, then one with wildly exaggerated prosody. Listen back and become conscious of how varying your pitch and prosody helps to deliver meaning and keep people interested.



Next pace: practice consciously speeding up and slowing down as you read to extend your range from its unconscious limits, which are probably quite narrow. Remember, variation maintains interest.



Finally volume: record yourself going from a whisper to a shout and back again a few times. Is your loud really loud? Can you feel comfortable at very low or high volume?

Keep practicing all these and you will naturally extend your range — and become conscious of using these tools to increase your power and connection when you speak.

4

DEPTH

EXERCISE 4: DEPTH

Place a hand on your sternum. Read a passage and focus on resonating there so you can feel it in your hand. Most people resonate in their head or neck; the chest is much larger and resonating there will deepen your voice and give you added authority.



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