

# If Your Voice Is Your Calling Card, Be Sure To Maximize It

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Many of us primarily do business over the phone. We rarely see people face-to-face. When the phone is our "calling card," it is a mistake to think our message is the only thing that counts. People read a lot into what they hear based on how the voice sounds. If the voice sounds confident and sincere, the listener concludes that the person must be knowledgeable, someone who knows his stuff. Conversely, if the voice sounds bored or arrogant, the listener perceives the speaker as someone who really doesn't care. The bottom line is that the voice affects whether someone trusts or believes you. With so much at stake, it is important to maximize your voice.

Improving your voice requires that you have the right gasoline or breath to fuel it. Diaphragmatic breathing will sustain your voice over the long haul. To assess whether you are breathing from the diaphragm or shallowly, stand in front of a bathroom mirror and place one hand on your diaphragm (which lies right under your rib cage) and one hand on your upper chest. Take in a deep breath and exhale. If you notice that you feel the breath first in your upper chest, you may be a shallow breather. If you also notice that your shoulders lift as you are breathing, you again are possibly breathing shallowly.

To learn how to use your diaphragm, lie on the floor and begin talking about an idea or process. You should notice how easy it is to make your points stand out and to finish your sentences so that the endings don't trail off. The only way you can breathe when lying prone is from the diaphragm. Now stand up. Take in a deep breath for a count of five; hold it for a count of two; and slowly exhale through an open mouth. Repeat this process several times. Then, after taking in a deep

breath, begin talking and notice how much breath you have. If you continue to practice diaphragmatic breathing throughout your day, it will become second nature for you and you won't have to think about it.

The second thing that will improve your voice is learning how to pause. Most of us are uncomfortable pausing, and thus it is the most underutilized tool that a speaker has at his disposal. Pausing is essential because it allows the listener to keep up with you, to digest your point, to compare your idea to someone else's, and to pose a question. For you as the speaker, there are also many advantages. It allows you time to think, to enunciate more clearly and to eliminate any non-words ("um's," "ah's," "like" and "you knows").

If you as the speaker pause at a comma or a period, listeners can easily keep up and you have time to think about what you want to say next. If you pause where you want to highlight a point, you build drama about what is coming next. When speaking on the phone, a pause for one to three seconds is all that is needed.

To assess how well you are pausing, use your internal voice message system. Before you send anyone a message, play it back. If you notice lots of non-words and if the endings of your words are not sharp, you are not pausing enough. To practice, redo those messages until you are satisfied. Also, practice explaining a business concept into a tape recorder, pausing every third or fourth word to emphasize a particular concept or idea. Play the tape back and listen to it from the other person's perspective. How impressed would the listener be with your voice? By pausing more, your voice will sound more sincere and empathetic. It will be easier for people to understand and remember the process you have described.

Finally, another way to maximize your voice is to smile. If you smile, the listener will hear the warmth in your voice, and he or she will perceive you in a more positive light. Also, if you smile, you start to refocus your approach to listener. It is likely that you will be more conversational and more relaxed. To remind yourself to smile, keep amusing pictures of your family and friends in your cubical and place

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a post-it note on your phone telling you to smile. Also, keep a mirror on your desktop. It will remind you of the importance of your facial expression.

Your voice is your best tool for persuasion. It is important to take seriously how your voice sounds. To maximize your voice breathe from the diaphragm, pause often and try smiling. Your listeners will notice the difference and will pay more attention to you and your message.

*Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, [www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com](http://www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com).*