

Activity 5

It's not what you say, it's the way that you say it!

Introduction

Research has shown that the importance of non-verbal elements of communication can override the verbal elements if there is a lack of congruence and consistency between the two. This is particularly marked during interpersonal communications that involve feeling and opinion and explore attitudes. Effective interpersonal skills require an awareness and mastery of these non-verbal elements, and this activity provides an opportunity for exploring and developing tone of voice in interpersonal situations.

Purpose

To give participants an understanding of the role that tone of voice plays in communicating effectively with other people; to help them develop their own skills and enhance their competence as effective communicators.

Application

This activity can work as a stand-alone session on developing the voice or as part of a programme aimed at developing interpersonal skills.

It is designed to be used at the start of any longer programme when participants need to understand and build a solid foundation before moving on to master more complex skills.

What happens

You start by introducing the participants to research that identifies the importance of the non-verbal elements in any interpersonal communication. You then indicate that the rest of this activity will focus on the area of tone of voice.

Next, you lead a discussion on the major aspects of the effective use of the voice in communication, illustrating the discussion with examples drawn

from your own experience. The participants then have an opportunity to explore and develop their skills in each of the areas.

Following this, the participants carry out a variety of exercises designed to enhance their ability to use voice tone to change the emphasis of their message during any conversation.

The activity closes with the participants reflecting on what they have learned during the exercises and identifying ways of transferring that learning back to their workplace.

Time

Overall time required: 1 hour 40 minutes

- Introduction: 30 minutes
- Voice tone: 25 minutes
- Developing voice tone: 10 minutes
- Mixed messages: 20 minutes
- Learning review: 15 minutes

Materials & resources

- 4 OHT masters:
 - 5.1 *Aspects of communication*
 - 5.2 *Five attributes of the voice*
 - 5.3 *The art of the pause*
 - 5.4 *Accent and colloquial speech*
- 3 Handout masters:
 - 5.5 *Voice tone*
 - 5.6 *Voice tone and interpersonal communication*
 - 0.1 *Action planning work sheet (optional)*
- 1 Trainer's brief:
 - 5.7 *Develop your voice tone*
- Overhead projector, or PowerPoint® compatible laptop computer and projector, and screen
- Flipchart and stand or whiteboard
- Marker pens for trainer
- Paper and pens for participants
- Space for undisturbed small-group work
- Two prepared sheets of flipchart paper

In preparation

Prepare a sheet of flipchart paper, for use in the Introduction, as shown below:

<i>Aspects of communication</i>		
<i>Words</i>	=	%
<i>Voice tone</i>	=	%
<i>Body language</i>	=	%
<i>Impact on communication</i>	=	100%

Think of some relevant examples of good and bad practice to illustrate the five attributes of the voice.

Use **Trainer's brief 5.7** *Develop your voice tone*, to practise carrying out the exercise *Developing voice tone*. Conduct the exercise as if you had the participants in front of you. This will make your instructions to the participants more fluent and spontaneous during the exercise.

Prepare a sheet of flipchart paper, which contains the expressions that will be used in the exercise, as shown below:

Develop your voice tone

- Come on, let's go!
- Hush!
- So!
- So what!
- I'm so tired!
- Look, they're coming!
- Ouch!

How do I do it?

INTRODUCTION

Aspects of communication

Reveal the sheet of flipchart paper headed Aspects of communication (see In preparation).

Ask if any of the participants has come across this research into the impact each of these aspects has on communication in situations that have a strong emotional content. Are we mainly influenced by the words? Is it the tone of voice of the person we are talking to, or do we rely on their body language to judge the believability of their communication?

Take some suggestions from the participants and write them on a sheet of flipchart paper. If anyone comes close to the 'right' answer, ask if it was a guess. Have they seen the research figures before, or is their answer based on their own perceptions?

Now reveal the research figures shown on OHT 5.1 Aspects of communication.



Show OHT 5.1

Aspects of communication

Advise the participants to be careful about accepting these figures at face value. They were published by Professor Albert Mehrabian in the USA during a study of a small group of individuals talking about their feelings and attitudes. The figures he identified related to situations where there was an element of inconsistency between the verbal and non-verbal elements.

His research shows the need to make all three elements of interpersonal communication compatible, not that the words are unimportant. If there is a lack of congruence between the three elements, then the words will be downgraded by the listener in favour of the impression made by the other two elements.

Tell the participants that in this activity they are going to focus on voice tone.



TRAINER'S TIP

Use this opportunity to signal that you will be covering other aspects of the key building blocks of effective interpersonal communication in other activities – *Activity 4 Ask a silly question* (words), and *Activity 6 Ma – he's making eyes at me!* (body language).

Spend about 10 minutes discussing aspects of communication.

The voice

There are a number of features of the use of the voice to consider in communication.



Show OHT 5.2

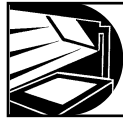
Five attributes of the voice

Discuss the five attributes shown on the OHT with the participants. Use your own prepared examples of good and bad practice (see In preparation), together with the following notes, to illustrate each point.

- **Energy** – the natural passion or conviction you use to deliver your message. The next time you are genuinely engrossed in what you are saying and you are talking with *energy*, make a note of what you are doing, as this is the most persuasive use of the voice.
- **Projection** – your volume. Too quiet and they can't hear you, too loud and you can sound as if you are hectoring or bullying them. Learn to pitch your voice without shouting.
- **Pace** – speed of delivery. Too fast and the message is lost, too slow and people get bored. Remember, public speaking makes everyone nervous. Take slow deep breaths and sip water to help measure pace and stay calm.
- **Intonation** – tone or melody, the sing-song nature of your voice. This carries a lot of meaning in the spoken word. You can safely overuse intonation before it sounds odd to the listener. Practise excessive intonation. It engages listeners and makes their job easier – for example, reading the weather or football scores over the radio depends on intonation.
- **Pausing** – the amount of space you put between words. A lack of space can make your tone of voice change and your speech becomes hurried and garbled. Effective speakers develop the art of the pause for dramatic effect.

Ask the participants to think of the rich voice tone of radio and TV presenters. Are they aware of how the gaps the presenters leave between words help to create atmosphere and give emphasis?

The art of the pause



Show OHT 5.3

The art of the pause

Referring to the OHT, ask the participants if they are aware of the non-words – ‘er...’ ‘ummmm’, ‘uh-huh’ – and confirmations – ‘Yees’, ‘I see’, ‘I know what you mean’ – they use.

These are usually a habit we assume without consciously choosing them, and are often a way of buying thinking time. To find out what their own non-words and confirmations are, they could try asking colleagues, friends and relations. Suggest that when they need thinking time, pause; if they need confirmation, check for understanding.

The only way to really find out what you sound like is to record yourself, practise the five attributes and listen to yourself – that is what you will sound like to others.

Accent and colloquial speech



Show OHT 5.4

Accent and colloquial speech

Read through the OHT with the participants and point out that the way people express themselves leaves them open to all kinds of prejudices.

Ask them to call out some of the stereotypes associated with certain types of regional accents, for example:

- Glaswegian Scots: devious, mean, stupid, violent, usually drunk, foul-mouthed
- Home counties Oxbridge: well educated, erudite, honest, upstanding, trustworthy.

Emphasise that neither of these prejudicial stereotypes is true, but people often jump to conclusions on the basis of little or no information in interpersonal settings. Research in selection

interviews shows that 90 per cent of the recruiters make up their mind in only 90 seconds, and all you've said is 'Hello' and 'Good morning'.

The best approach to accents and colloquial speech is to check for understanding from the body language and response of the person with whom you are communicating.

What signs of misunderstanding have you noticed – blank looks, being asked to repeat what you said, going off at a tangent? These are all signs of lack of communication. If this happens, have a simple explanation for any slang, jargon or acronym you use. Don't try to put on an accent that doesn't come naturally, but do take your time and 'translate' any words you think may cause a problem.

Allow about 30 minutes in total to make your introduction.

VOICE TONE

Divide the participants into pairs and tell them that one partner will play the speaker whilst the other listens.



Distribute Handout 5.5

Voice tone

Brief the participants on what they are to do by reading through the handout with them.

Remind them to allow about 5 minutes for feedback from the listener before changing roles. This exercise should take about 20 minutes.

The participants should then spend a further 5 minutes discussing how they can improve the use of their voice in interpersonal communications.

DEVELOPING VOICE TONE

Tell the participants that when their vocal cords are free and working at maximum efficiency, they will produce an effective tone of voice without effort. Good tone begins smoothly and can be sustained over a considerable period of time. To achieve this, one of the essential ingredients is good posture so that the mechanics of the body do not inhibit the voice.

Ask the participants to try this exercise which is designed to check out their posture and its effect on their voice projection. Use **Trainer's brief 5.7** *Develop your voice tone*, to carry out the exercise. It will be helpful if you have prepared for this in advance (see In preparation).

Lead a brief review of how comfortable they felt with a changed body position. What did they notice about the differences between the three positions? Which was easiest on their body and breathing?

Emphasise the difference our tone of voice can make to the intensity and effect of our message.

Finally, reveal the sheet of flipchart paper you prepared earlier (see In preparation) and ask the participants to arrange their arms, face, voice and whole body into the exclamations written on the flipchart. Tell them to imagine a variety of situations where they would use the words and try to respond as they would in those situations, as if they were miming the action or attitude.

Allow about 10 minutes for this exercise.

MIXED MESSAGES

This exercise will help the participants become more aware of what their voice is doing when they are involved in interpersonal communication involving emotion.



Distribute Handout 5.6

Voice tone and interpersonal communication

Divide the participants into groups of three or four and read through the handout with them so they know how to do the exercise. Emphasise that each member of the group should have a go at speaking in the various styles.

Tell them they have about 20 minutes to carry out the exercise.

LEARNING REVIEW

After this final exercise, reconvene the participants and lead a review for about 15 minutes of the key learning points that have emerged during this activity. Ask them to focus their thoughts for a few minutes on two key issues:

1. What I've learned about my own voice when communicating.
2. What style I can adopt to be more effective in interpersonal relations.



Distribute Handout 0.1

Action planning work sheet (optional)

Give them 5 minutes to make some written notes and then ask for some of their ideas. Write these on a sheet of flipchart paper.

Remind the participants that authenticity is a key ingredient of communication so, if they want to change, they need to know they can carry their action plans through. Suggest the best way to start would be with some gentle practice. Advise them not to tackle very stressful situations until they have first developed the skills in less fraught areas.

When everyone who wants to has shared their learning and action plans, thank them for their contribution to the activity and close the session.



Aspects of communication

Words = 7%

Voice tone = 38%

Body language = 55%

Impact on communication = 100%

Source: *Silent Messages*, Mehrabian A, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc, Belmont, California (1971)
ISBN 0 534000 59 2



Five attributes of the voice

1. **Energy – your natural passion or conviction.**
2. **Projection – the volume.**
3. **Pace – the speed.**
4. **Intonation – the modulation.**
5. **Pausing – adding emphasis.**



The art of the pause

- **Learn to recognise the non-words you use**
 - Er, ummmm, uh–huh.
- **Do you know what confirmations you use?**
 - Yees, I see, I know what you mean.
- **Replace non-words and confirmations with pauses.**

FOR PREVIEW ONLY





Accent and colloquial speech

- **Accent**
 - be authentic but understandable.
- **Colloquial speech**
 - check for understanding
 - give a simple explanation or translation.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY





Voice tone

Working with a partner, you will have the opportunity to explore seven aspects of your speech.

When speaking, talk for 5 minutes about a subject of your choice, something you feel enthusiastic about, such as: My favourite holiday; What I would do if I won the jackpot on the National Lottery.

When you are the listener, don't interrupt except to clarify areas you don't understand – the use of slang, jargon, and so on. At the end of the time allocated, give your partner some feedback on these aspects of their speech:

- energy
- projection
- pace
- intonation
- pausing
- accent
- colloquial speech.

Together, spend 5 minutes drawing up a plan for improving how you use your voice in interpersonal communications.

FOR PREVIEW ONLY

Voice tone and interpersonal communication

This exercise gives you an opportunity to become more aware of what your voice is doing when you are engaged in an interpersonal communication that involves emotion.

Each person in your group, in turn, says each of the sentences in the list below, using exactly the same words in the following styles:

- heartfelt, then unthinking
- showing dislike, then being neutral
- hostile, then like a best friend
- saying one thing but implying something else.

Then, each member of the group will take another turn mixing up the order of the styles to see whether the other people in the group can tell which style they are using. When it's your turn, notice how your voice sounds and what position your body is in.

- I'm not happy with this piece of work and I want it done again.
- I've got a lot of work to get through and I don't want to chat now.
- Well done! You managed that brilliantly.
- I am not happy with that decision, I would like to discuss it further.
- What exactly do you want me to do?

Make sure everyone in your group has the opportunity to have a go at speaking the sentences in the different styles.

You have 20 minutes to complete the exercise.



Develop your voice tone

Stand erect with your feet comfortably apart. Make sure all ten toes are firmly planted on the ground. Hold your chest high but don't stiffen your shoulders and over-arch your back. When you are sure you are comfortably balanced, say a long sustained 'AH' – 'AAAAAAHHHHH'.

If your posture feels too stiff, bend forward from the hips and let your arms and head hang limp. Now slowly uncurl, straightening the small of your back, your back and then your neck before speaking. Don't push your shoulders too far back at any time.

If you tend to slouch forward, lift your arms above your head. Stretch upwards, rising on your toes until you can feel a tingle in your fingers and whole body. Now sink back to the normal posture position and again vocalise 'AAAAHHH'.

(If you want some variety, you can try 'OOOOOOO' and 'EEEEEEE' as well.)

Our breathing tends to follow our posture. Let your breath escape with your voice, and notice what happens to your breathing and posture when you say (half-voice, half-whisper) 'I am now talking with a very breathy voice'.

(Pause to let the participants all speak the phrase in the style requested.)

Now strain hard as you say, 'I am now talking with a tight, hard, strained voice'.

Finally, say, with as relaxed and easy a tone as you can muster, 'I am now talking with as easy and relaxed a voice as I possibly can'.