Use Vocal Variety Like A Pro!

January 13, 2015 [Coach Kiomi](http://coachkiomi.com/author/mmcbiz/)

Vocal variety refers to varying your voice quality through tone, pitch, pace, and volume, it’s the opposite of a monotone voice. Effective communication skills can be greatly enhanced when vocal variety techniques are employed. A dynamic presenter will maximize the use of vocal variety to keep the audience interested and engaged.

**The Importance of Vocal Variety**

Vocal variety is as important for public speaking as varying melody, harmony, and pitch for a song. Wouldn’t a song be boring if there was only one pitch or beat? The same is true for effective communication skills. To evoke emotion and engage your listeners, as well as influencing and persuading them, utilizing vocal variety is essential to effective public speaking skills.

**There are four key qualities to vocal variety** that can be remembered using the acronym **VPPT.**  Use this sentence to remember the first 4 letters, **V**ery **P**olished **P**resentation **T**hanks.

**Volume –** The volume of your voice is how loud or quiet you speak. Varying volume can add impact and power to improve public speaking skills. A loud volume may be used to emphasize a point with confidence and enthusiasm. A softer, quiet volume can be used like a whisper to draw in the audience so they listen more intently. Using volume effectively can strengthen your message and increase audience attention.

**Pace –** The pace of your voice, also known as rate of speech, refers to how fast or slow you talk. A fast pace is highly effective for motivational, high energy presentations. A slower pace is most effective when you want to engage your audience’s mind to think, reflect and contemplate. However, just like having a car that only drives at one speed, driving too slow or fast all day would be impractical and unsafe. Using only one pace when giving a presentation, slow or fast during the entire speech can either bore or overwhelm your audience. Like all other vocal variety qualities, vary your pace to hold the attention of your audience.

And don’t forget to use pauses! Many speakers are hesitant to pause because they mistakenly think pausing exhibits a lack of confidence. I’d like you to think of pauses like this, magazine advertisements use white space judiciously. A page crammed full of text is excessive and you’d ignore it. Speaking without pausing is cramming information and your audience will mentally check out. Instead, pause occasionally to allow your listeners to take in the information and to process it before you move on to your next idea. If you want your audience to remember what you said, there’s nothing like pausing before or after an important point to emphasize the message.

**Pitch** – The pitch of your voice is defined by the relative high or low sound of your voice. A lower, deeper pitch is associated with authority, power and leadership. A higher pitch is associated with excitement, lightness and fun.Your inflection refers to the wavelike movement of your vocal range, which can be expressed differently based on your intonation, the rise and fall of your voice when speaking. Read the following two sentences out loud and hear how your inflection varies:

I love public speaking!

I love public speaking?

I love public speaking.

Notice your pitch became higher with the exclamation, lower stating it as a question, and even pitched using the period. This is a simple example of speech training, repeating one sentence several times, varying the pitch each time to improve your vocal variety skills.

**Tone** – The tone of your voice is the “emotional tone” you use when speaking.  Tone is defined as the manner or delivery of your speech. Examples of tone are somber, excited, matter of fact, or a friendly tone. This is my favorite vocal variety skill because it’s the mood and emotion of your speech that will make it impactful, captivating and memorable. The tone of a graduation or wedding speech is delivered with emotions of pride, love and warmth. An inaugural speech is delivered with energy, inspiration, exaltation, inspiring hope for the future. A sales presentation delivered with passion ignites excitement, compelling customers to take action.

The tone of your voice determines how your audience will feel during and after your speech. Maya Angelou said, “People may not remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel.” This quote brings home the point that the tone of your speech is vital to creating the desired impact and outcome. *How* you deliver your message can be more important than *what* you say. Vocal variety one of THE most important public speaking skills to master.

**So how do you use vocal variety and make it sound natural?**

1. Connect to the meaning and emotion of the message. Identify first what YOU like most about the message. Make it meaningful and compelling to you, then the emotion will be conveyed to your audience. Emotions are contagious. When you feel the emotional impact of your message, so will your audience.
2. Once you have connected what’s meaningful for you, ask yourself, “How do I want my audience to feel?” Excited during a motivational speech? Reassured when announcing layoffs? Persuaded and ready to buy your product? Sometimes you can mix emotions, like in a disaster preparedness workshop, you might use shock, fear, and even humor to drive home the message to get supplies for an emergency preparedness kit this week. Be clear of your goal and desired outcome before writing your presentation.  This will guide the content, structure and organization of your speech.
3. Consider the size of the audience. If it’s a small room with 5-7 people, your voice can be softer so you create a closer connection. Ask for feedback because it can be easy to overpower people in a small space. If you are presenting in a large auditorium with several hundred people, speak louder and faster. Higher energy is better. You can make a few points in a soft tone granted you have a great microphone. Doing so will create an intimate moment as if you are whispering in their ear.
4. Audio record a rehearsal of your speech. Identify, assess and adjust as needed. Listening to yourself from this objective perspective helps you craft the content of your message as well as improve your vocal variety. Most people initially, do not like the sound of their own voice. This is very common. Suspend judgment as much as possible. I promise you, your voice will sound more appealing the more you listen to it! Refrain from excessive, unconstructive self criticism. Instead, be constructively compassionate with yourself as you modify and continue to improve your communication skills.