

IS IT POSSIBLE TO IMPROVE YOUR VOICE? by Dr. Sadhana. Nayak

Meera and Rohit are intelligent, hardworking professionals. But, they often wonder why people react to them the way they do. The reason is their voice conveys the wrong impression about them. People who have a bad voice- the kind that sets the listener's teeth on edge are very often not aware of it. An unpleasant voice is associated with a disagreeable personality. It is believed that a shrill, grating voice belongs to a tense, neurotic individual; a nasal whiny voice to a complainer; a soft, inaudible voice to a weak personality; a monotonous voice to a dull, boring personality. This may not always be true. But these are voice stereotypes we recognise and therefore we form a wrong impression of people when we listen to them for the first time. Good voice and speech habits improve our chances of professional and social success. Dr. Aronson, a renowned speech pathologist in the U.S. says the higher one ascends the socioeconomic scale, the greater the emphasis on pleasant, effective voices. How a person says something forms a lasting impression on people, especially in situations like job interviews, business interactions, sales deals and social interactions with strangers, where you need to create an impact on the listener in a short time. Telephone operators and receptionists need to speak in a courteous and clear tone to convey the right impression about the company. People working at call centers should have correct and crisp diction. Sales and marketing executives need to develop a persuasive voice.

A good voice has certain characteristics -a pleasant quality, appropriate loudness, clear and intelligible articulation or diction, expressiveness with good inflections, appropriate emphasis, pauses and pitch variability.

In the U.S, working on enhancement of the voice is considered a vital part of image building. President George W Bush [the current president's father] was advised to lower the pitch of his voice. In the time between his acceptance speech and inaugural address, he dropped his pitch about a tone and a half.

Most of us are appalled when we first hear ourselves on a tape. 'Is that really me? I don't sound like this.' is the standard response. But the reality is that you do sound like this. When you hear your own voice you hear it through sound waves travelling partly through air and partly through the bones of your skull. However, others hear your voice purely through sound waves that travel from your voice box through the air to the listener's ears. Therefore, what you hear of yourself is not how others hear you.

If you are dissatisfied with your voice, you can improve it i.e. you can maximize the potential of your natural voice through vocal training. Each of us is born with a voice based on our genetic predisposition and structure. However, most of us do not use our vocal apparatus to its maximum potential.

When you hear performers with good voices you may envy them and feel they are lucky to be born with a great voice. But the truth is that the beautiful, resonant voices that you hear on stage, television, radio, in films and advertisements are rarely acquired accidentally. They are developed through years of hard work, practice and discipline. Developing a good voice is like body building or losing weight. There are no short cuts. You need motivation, discipline and determination to reach your goals.

A good voice training program provides techniques, exercises and philosophies for improving voice quality, power, range, flexibility and endurance. It includes a series of graded exercises for improving breath control, articulation, volume control, voice projection, intonation, rhythm, phrasing, expressiveness and for optimisation of pitch and pitch range, tone focus and resonance.