Key Concepts

- A “speech problem” is an aspect of a person’s speech that calls attention to itself or causes a person to be distracted from the message.
- New speech patterns will feel strange. If they do not feel strange, the speaker is probably not doing anything differently.
- A person needs deliberate, mindful repetition to make new speech patterns easy and smooth.
- People who are timid and unsure of themselves will have voices that display that discomfort.
- The sound of peoples’ voices reflect their physical and psychological characteristics.
- The difference between a person who is just talking and a person who is talking to someone is the feeling of interpersonal connection.
- If a person does not want to engage in conversation, a dismissive “yes” or “no” is the way to go. Otherwise, more extensive conversation is necessary to convey civility.
- Speech is generally clearer when people move their mouths more, speak more slowly, and direct the flow of speech energy to the front of their mouths.
- Eye contact when speaking to others is essential.
- During networking events, people should appear approachable, friendly, and non-threatening.
- In interview situations, the interviewee should make the interview more of a two-way conversation instead of just passively answering questions.
- Public speaking is a great way to demonstrate leadership, influence people, and build a solid future.

Introduction

In It’s the Way You Say It, Dr. Carol A. Fleming addresses the most common issues people face when it comes to their speaking abilities. This is not a book about medical issues, but rather the bad habits and psychological issues many people have acquired either through poor socialization, lack of education,
self-esteem issues, or even just personality quirks. Whether a person has a habit of speaking too fast, mumbling, using too many unnecessary words, or has a fear of public speaking, this book offers tips to help diagnose and treat the problem. Dr. Fleming offers specific exercises everyone can do in the comfort of their own homes or in situations with friends or family to help get over their speaking inadequacies.

**Assessing Your Voice**

People are usually not good judges of their own speech characteristics. The first step in improving speech is to adequately assess a person’s speech and figure out specifically what needs to be improved.

There are generally two components to speech problems. The first includes linguistic learning, habits of speaking, and expressions, which can be changed through the identification and practice of new patterns. The second is the psychological aspects that can cause or be the result of the speech pattern.

**Resolving Specific Problems**

People who have difficulty pronouncing certain sounds should seek the help of a speech pathologist. However, many vocal irregularities can be cleared up with some basic training techniques. People must keep in mind that new speech patterns will feel strange at first. When practicing, they should be patient and not overly correct. They must also use systematic repetition for the new habit to take hold. Once an individual has practiced alone, the new speech habits should be practiced in real environments with a neutral audience.

There is a vast array of specific speech problems that individuals may experience:

**Fast Talkers**

People who speak too fast often use articulation shortcuts that make it difficult for others to understand them. The more people a person is speaking to, the slower the speech should be. Larger room sizes and rooms with strange acoustics or noise distractions can also make speech more difficult to understand. Additionally, older listeners often need more processing time. Fast speakers’ sense of urgency often overrides self-monitoring and consideration of the needs of listeners. Fast talkers should listen to a recording of themselves and transcribe it to see how they could reformulate the speech in more concise and understandable language with pauses to help solidify their main points.

**Loud Talkers**

When loud speech is recognized as a problem, speakers must become aware of how they feel inside when speaking loudly. These physical and emotional feelings are cues that the speakers are ramping up their voices. Loud talkers must recognize that when they feel a certain way, they also sound a certain way. Since loud talkers are often oblivious to the actual volume of their voices, this is a good way to keep things in check. Loud talkers should also get their hearing checked just to be sure there is not a problem.

**Soft Talkers**

It is nearly impossible to understand someone that cannot be heard. People who cannot command a space with their voices cannot fully utilize their authority or knowledge. Soft talkers should learn to increase their vocal power through motivation, energy, and air support. Motivation comes from confidence and

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**FURTHER INFORMATION**

Information about the author and subject:
[www.speechtraining.com](http://www.speechtraining.com)

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preparation. Energy comes when speakers learn how to project their voices across a room. Speakers can practice by placing photos across the room and practicing speaking to and making eye contact with the people in the photographs. They should eventually move on to practicing with real people.

Another method is for soft talkers to practice managing their air support. Air support comes from practicing deep breathing exercises. Shallow breathing is very common and causes people to stop speaking in odd places to breathe. People who breathe shallowly may suffer from tension, and stretching and breathing exercises can help.

Raspy Talkers
People with raspy voices often hold their voices back in their throats due to inadequate breath support, sheer habit, poor voice role models, or even just a hesitancy to speak out. Speakers should always remember to drink plenty of water before speaking and to give their vocal chords plenty of rest. If they participate in activities that result in a large amount of loud speaking or yelling, they should be cognizant of that and reduce it if possible.

High Talkers
Lower pitched voices are often associated with strength. Some people start sentences with a high pitch and do not realize it until they hear themselves speak, or they speak in a consistently high voice that makes them sound very young or meek.

Indecisive Talkers
Speakers who speak at one pitch level when making a statement often sound indecisive and equivocal. To be more convincing, speakers must raise and lower their voices to different pitch levels when making statements. Words to be emphasized should be at a more elevated pitch than normal, while the end of the sentence should be at a lower pitch than normal. People who have problems doing this should try to listen to people they find authoritative and mimic their speech patterns.

If you are sometimes described as monotonous or boring in speech delivery, it is a good idea to spend some time developing your awareness and use of intonation patterns.

Staccato Talkers
Many people strain their vocal chords simply by the way they talk. The habit of starting each word with a little explosion in the onset of their voices is called a “glottal attack.” In situations where a speaker is angry or energized, the effect may be magnified. Speakers must work on using linked, gentle syllables.

Breathy Talkers
People who allow air to escape with their voices sound intimate and sensual. This type of voice has low volume, indistinct articulation, and can be very difficult to understand in noisy situations. Many people who speak this way just need to practice speaking louder, which adds muscular tension to their vocal folds.

Fading Talkers
People whose sentences often start strong and then fade off at the end are often lacking in confidence, or they are simply not taking in enough air. It is important for them to practice reading aloud and finding the natural points within sentences that allow them to take a breath.
Developing a Dynamic Voice

The sounds of peoples’ voices illustrate their attitudes about what they are saying. Monotonous voices are dull and difficult to understand. Many people who do not have expressive voices may prefer to hide their emotions. Role playing, dancing, and singing are also ways to help speakers loosen up, gain confidence, and become more expressive.

Vocal intonations tell listeners a lot. Even a dog or a baby will interpret a person’s mood by his vocal intonations. When a person says awful things in a nice voice, dogs and babies interpret it as being nice. If a person says nice things in a mean voice, the opposite happens.

Rate (the speed of speaking), pitch (how high or low the voice goes), and volume also affect how others resonate with a speaker. Musical voices are highly desirable, and people with good vocal variety will attract others to them in both their professional and personal lives.

Getting Emphatic

People naturally emphasize some syllables more than others. Emphasized syllables signal word meaning or emotional meaning. People who speak with minimal energy often sound monotonous and dull. People also do a lot of subtle communication, including innuendos, hints, and suggestions, through patterns of relative emphasis.

Some people are too emphatic. People with very little variation in stress may be difficult to understand or viewed as authoritarian or dictatorial. People who speak this way may not realize they are doing it, but it can cause problems in the workplace or in their personal lives.

If there is a marked difference between what a person meant and what was heard, he should review what he emphasized with his tone. The way people speak conveys much of their meaning.

Developing the Resonant Voice

A head voice is a young, thin voice that emanates from the front of the face. It may sound whinny or childlike. A chest voice is lower pitched and comes more from the throat and chest. To achieve the chest voice, speakers must open their throats more, like they do when they yawn.

Tonal support, or emphasis on syllables, is probably the single most important technique in producing a beautiful voice. It enables clearer communication, increased vocal resonance, enhanced melody lines, and an increased sense of being relationship-oriented. Speakers can put their hands on their throats and sing and feel a steady stream of vibration, or tonal support. To develop good tonal support, it is important for people to glide from one syllable to the next. When done correctly, all sounds are heard.

Pitch Perfect

Peoples’ physical and psychological characteristics are reflected by their voices. Pitch, in particular, carries very heavy psychological weight. A pitch that is too high sounds juvenile, and a pitch that is too low can sound raspy and unhealthy. A person with a too high or too low voice should practice controlling his pitch at an acceptable level.

Similarly, a person who would like to learn to sing can usually do so with a lot of practice. Aspiring singers must find a voice professional to help with training. They must also practice matching their voices to various musical tones. Even the telephone dial tone is a good place to start.

Becoming Well-Spoken

People want to make a good impression on others, and being well-spoken is one way to do that. A person who is well-spoken is articulate, fluent, and courteous. An articulate person uses short, powerful statements of fact and does not ramble. Too many extraneous words get in the way of making the point in a clear and forceful manner. These simple declarative sentences (SDSs) produce much more effective communications. Using SSDs is associated with confidence, clarity, and authority.

Being well-spoken sounds pretty good, doesn’t it? It puts us in a certain class of people who appear to be polished and verbally competent, fluent, gracious, and proper.
Empty language provides no substance, but demands lots of emotional energy. Intensifiers such as “just,” “really,” and “so,” as well as superlatives like “fantastic” and “terrific,” do not provide any real meaning to a conversation. In moderation they are fine, but many people pepper these words throughout their entire conversations, making them less meaningful than if they were carefully used.

Overusing the “uhhh” sound is another common issue. This empty sound generally signifies a laboring train of thought. While normal in everyday conversation, it poses a problem during speeches. Speech givers should be well prepared so they do not need to use empty sounds.

To improve their vocabularies, people should socialize with others who have better educations and more developed language skills than the people they usually see. Spending time with people of different achievements and education levels exposes people to words they do not know.

**Speaking Your Mind Effectively**

*Self-expression* is the act of people saying what they want to say in a manner that comes naturally. This is different than communication, where the listener is on the speaker’s mind as he speaks. A speaker who speaks to the concerns of the listener and makes eye contact is a better-received speaker. By investing 50 percent of their attention to their listeners, speakers will get 100 percent reception from them.

However, some people are so uncomfortable in social settings that they do not realize they are not being polite to others. Kindness, courtesy, consideration, and graciousness are essential parts of social interactions. Idle chit chat involves more than just providing a “yes” or “no” answer to a question, such as in the phrase, “Are you friends with the groom?” Social courtesy dictates that instead of answering “yes,” the person should elaborate and say, “Yes, I am. We met as undergrads in college.” This moves the conversation forward in a friendly and courteous manner and is socially appropriate. This method of communication makes the speaker appear more approachable.

Gracious language can also transform situations. In a tense situation with difficult or angry people, a person can choose to become a part of the solution by trying to get the best out of the troublemaker instead of making things worse by responding with more negativity. **People need to feel warmth, welcome, and a sense that you are pleased to see them. For this, we give them eye contact and a smile.**

**I Wanna Be Articulate!**

People who are articulate have a style of speaking that reveals a cultured mind. Their vocabulary is developed, and they use real words with few fillers or empty language. They are concise, well organized, and they speak clearly. Sloppy speakers often leave negative first impressions.

People who speak too softly or too fast have a tendency to mumble. Lack of clarity in speech can have dire consequences. Take for example a person who does not fully articulate the “t” sound when saying “can’t.” If the listener thinks they said “can,” there could be a major problem or miscommunication.

There are many variations in the pronunciation of words. Take for example the word “our.” While it should be pronounced like “hour,” some people pronounce it like “are.” These sorts of details come across as substandard speech.

Articulate people are easy to understand because they make necessary speech sounds easy to hear. The biggest culprit of omitted sounds is the articulation of the final /t/ sound in words, especially when it is grouped with other consonants. Dropping the final /g/ is also common. Many say “gonna” instead of “going to.”

The words “the” and “a” also cause confusion for many. “A” should be pronounced “uh,” not pronounced like the letter “A.” “The” should be pronounced “thee” when in front of a word that begins with a vowel, and like “thuh” when it is in front of a word that begins with a consonant.

To speak more clearly, people should move their mouths more, speak more slowly, and direct the flow of speech energy out the front of their mouths.
UNIFYING YOUR VERBAL AND NONVERBAL MESSAGES

People use more than just words to figure out meaning. A person’s tone of voice accounts for much more of the impact than actual words. The verbal, vocal, and physical all come together to form a reality that is more than the sum of its parts. Most people are good at reading the three channels of communication in other people, but are not as good at understanding what they are sending out. If there are any mixed messages, the person loses credibility.

HOW YOU LOOK WHEN YOU TALK

Posture is used to determine a person’s attitude. Distortions of the body alignment destroy any semblance of composure. Head carriage, or the way people position and hold their heads, is a profound communicator of attitude and is the primary indicator of dignity. Also, when walking, people should hold their arms and legs close to their bodies to denote gracefulness and style.

Facial movements convey a lot of emotional and attitudinal information as well. Too much distortion detracts from professionalism. People should videotape themselves speaking to see if there are any quirks that should be addressed.

Making Eye Contact

Eye contact, or lack thereof, can have a great impact on communication. The meeting of eyes during a conversation is essential for building trust; however, staring fixedly at someone can be intimidating.

People who find it difficult to make eye contact can start by glancing at other’s ears or glasses, which gives the impression of eye contact. People must keep in mind, however, that some cultures do not make direct eye contact as an act of respect.

Speakers must look as if they are listening, even if they can listen well with distractions. This means they must stop what they are doing, look at the person speaking, lean toward them, nod their heads occasionally, and reflect on what was said.

Becoming Approachable

In networking situations, it is easier to be approached by others than it is to do the approaching. To prepare for this, people should wear or bring an item that stands out as a good conversation starter. To do this, they can use the SOFTEN technique:

- Smile
- Open posture
- Forward lean
- Touch (handshake)
- Eye contact
- Nod

Short people often experience biases that can lead to frustration, lowered self-esteem, lack of career progression, and sometimes depression. In order to help with this, people with shorter stature should have excellent posture and head control. Their clothes should also fit well and should be flattering.

LET’S TALK BUSINESS!

There are three aspects of work behavior that are important to a person’s professionalism:

1. Expertise
2. Attitudes and standards
3. Communication skills

People must be able to articulate their expertise. They must also be able to introduce themselves by mentioning their achievements, milestones, and credentials and have a good attitude and high standards at work. To be effective in getting their self-introductions heard and remembered, people must make consciously decide to be easily heard and seen. They must remember that they are representatives of their companies and their actions will reflect on those companies. During a speaking or networking event, people must be mindful of every move they make. They should get up from the table carefully, say their names deliberately, think about everything they say, look directly at their listeners, speak to the people furthest from them, and not rush their introductions.

Although business social situations expressly support business interchange, you need to observe the rituals and courtesies of regular social interchange.
When interviewing, it is important for people to make the interview into a two-way conversation instead of passively answering questions. However, this requires preparation. They must ensure they know as much about the person doing the interview as the interviewer knows about them. They should always consider why an interviewer would want to know something and then craft an answer to address that.

**Leave Me Voice Mail**

When leaving voice mail, people should identify themselves clearly and say their complete phone numbers right after their names. Their messages should get right to the point and should never just say, “Call me.” They should indicate if there is any urgency. In closing, they should repeat their names, phone numbers, and the best times to reach them.

There should always be a beginning, a middle, and an end to a voice mail. A person can use an opening statement to construct a bridge between the listeners and the topic.

**Smooth Small Talk**

Small talk often throws people for a loop. When people feel self-conscious, they should invest their attention in other people instead of themselves. When approaching someone, they should do it politely. They should never share their problems or engage in heated discussions. Small talk should involve neutral conversation topics such as the weather, music, or food.

There is an easy three-step process people can use to determine appropriate conversational topics:

1. **Anchor** the conversation with a topic that is part of a mutual shared reality, such as “It looks like it is pouring outside.”

2. **Reveal** something personal that is related to the anchor, such as “What do you know, my umbrella is in the car!”

3. **Encourage** by inviting the other person to speak with a question, such as “How did you manage to get in and stay so dry?”

How a person looks is also important in social situations. Peoples’ wardrobes, grooming, and carriages are all judged by others in order to help them determine whether the people are approachable and if they should be looked up to and respected.

The most valuable tool in conversation is the use of additional comments and facts beyond the opening anchor that allows the conversation to go deeper. When speaking, people should always try to keep the conversation going by never giving one-syllable responses, which are conversation killers. These social interactions can be turned into effective business conversations by bridging the initial pleasantries into business topics.

People should always have a purpose in social situations so that it will be easier for them to disengage from the conversations when necessary. Making remarks that note the passage of time or simply looking at their watches can signal to the other person that it is time to move on.

**Speaking in Front of People**

Public speaking allows people to demonstrate leadership, influence others, and build their own futures. However, the anxiety and dread caused by public speaking can be debilitating. Luckily, getting pertinent information and coaching can break that cycle for many people.

People often overestimate other people’s interest in them. To combat this, the speaker can focus on the needs of the audience by coming up with ways to ignite their enthusiasm.

**Leave as Little to Chance as Possible**

Speakers should always think about the goals and overall messages of their presentations while taking the needs of their audience members into consideration. They should also be able to deliver their material without reading it straight from notecards or slides. A couple of notecards with a few general ideas written in large print will suffice.

Speakers should make eye contact with the members of the audience. They should ensure that their content...
is simple, straightforward, honest, and immediate. Their voices should project, appearing as if they want to fill the room with their presence.

Those who use PowerPoint should make sure the information between the spoken word and the visual forms are balanced. Modern presentation products are supposed to supplement, not substitute the speaker’s thoughts and remarks. Good slides have pictures, bar graphs, charts, maps, and video. Bad slides have small print, many words, or dense data better suited for a handout. Slide data does not stick with an audience the same way that stories do.

When working on speaking problems, people need specific diagnoses as to what their actual problems are. Once an accurate diagnosis is assessed, determined and deliberate repetition of the corrected patterns is the only way they can make changes.

Features of the Book

Estimated Reading Time: 3–4 hours, 239 pages

It’s the Way You Say It by Dr. Carol A. Fleming is for anyone who wants to improve their speaking ability, whether it is for general conversation, public speaking, business leadership roles, or other situations. The book offers very specific ways to diagnose and even treat the most common bad speaking habits many people possess. The book also includes a chapter full of resources, including checklists and additional speaking exercises. Readers who have specific speaking issues that they would like to address may want to focus more on specific sections of the book that address their personal needs.

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