

Don't Shoot the Messenger

How to find your voice

You have all the characteristics of a popular politician: a horrible voice, bad breeding, and a vulgar manner.

Aristophanes (450 BC - 388 BC), Knights, 424 B.C.

Are you confident in the way you come over to other people?

Does the idea of making a presentation fill you with anxiety?

Do you like the sound of your own voice?

Do you even know what you really sound like?

Public Speaking Vs Root Canal Work?

For many, the thought of having to stand up and speak to a room full of strangers is as appealing as deep root canal treatment or teeth extractions, but like it or not, the ability to be able to communicate effectively is vital both for us as solicitors and also in other areas of professional life.

For example Philip Parkin, general secretary of the Professional Association of Teachers, addressed their annual conference in 2006 and concluded that 'the care and the use of the voice should be an essential and mandatory component of all initial teacher training.'

Research has shown that an impaired voice - e.g. one that is hoarse from over use, misuse or lack of care, places additional demands on the listener as more resources are directed to perceptual processing, thus reducing processing capacity for the comprehension of information.

If this is true for teachers trying to influence the children in their care, then the same must be the case for lawyers who need to connect vocally with a variety of audiences. And as well as taking care of our voices, how much more could we achieve if we actually trained them and turned this untapped resource to our advantage?

An internal and external approach

But what do we mean by communication? Well, Aristophanes had it right over 2000 years ago - it is not just about standing up and talking. Communication is about body language, what you say, how you say it and reading your audiences. Good communication starts from the minute you walk in a room, how you hold yourself, how you shake hands, your facial expression and then the all important voice.

The ability to get your message across comes from both internal preparation: voice, breathing, and posture leading to clarity and articulation - and external preparation: what you say in which order to your target audience. Both are equally important.

Perhaps our own insecurities about our vocal presentation may in some way be our greatest strength? One leading HR professional recently commented: "I have heard from my colleagues that more women than men will actually admit to lack of confidence in this area and they will ask for training. We think men have the same level of difficulties but the reality is that they are not in a hurry to own up to this."

Know your voice

Kate Terris, actress, voice coach and co-founder of Voice at Work, a vocal training company maintains that from the moment you open your mouth, people are making a judgement about you. "Only seven per cent of what you say registers with

people. Most of what they take on board and remember about you is your actual voice, pitch, pace, and accent."

She claims that we are all natural communicators. "As babies we all have tremendous vocal energy but vocal blocks happen as we get older when we are instructed to stand straight, be quiet or even hold our tongue. All this does is affect our vocal confidence."

As we all know, a dull, monotonous voice will be a turn-off to any potential client, and we all need to sound convincing and professional on every level. Kate always recommends the importance of practising out loud as much as you can, to exercise your vocal muscles and to boost your confidence. "Rather like singing, or taking part in any form of exercise - you need to do a warm up before any big pitch or presentation to help get into the occasion."

Mirroring - Who are you pitching to?

Good presentation skills are about knowing who you are talking to, listening to them and mirroring back to them your message in a style that reflects their own. As Gwen Rhys, Chief Executive of Networking Culture and herself a frequent speaker, says: "Being able to communicate is key to networking and influencing others. You have to have the ability to tap into other people and get on with them on their terms. That leads to the gaining of trust and what I call adding value - making that conversation work for you."

Mirroring also plays a huge part in pitches and presentations. As soon as you know you have to speak or pitch, the first thing you should ascertain is who your audience is. How do they think?

Preparation - What's in it for them?

As soon as you are invited to speak to a group of people is when you start to unpick the needs and wants of that audience. There are many questions you need to ask to ensure the best possible outcome from the event:

- What is the event all about?
- What is the agenda - hidden or otherwise?
- What about the people in the audience - what level are they at, are they the decision makers or influencers? How do they relate to each other? Could there be reasons for underlying tensions?
- How many people will be there?
- Where is the venue? Do I know the room layout? If not, how can I find out? Where are the electric sockets for example?
- How am I feeling? Have I prepared enough? Am I feeling confident?

The problem many people face before a major presentation is that all too often as the speaker they are well aware of what

they want to say but have paid scant regard to why the audience would want to listen - the key thing to remember is what is in it for them?

The delivery

So you have sussed out who you are speaking to, why you are there and where it is taking place. You have warmed up your voice - now all that is left is the delivery of the message.

And in achieving delivery of the message, one shouldn't forsake the messenger. You are hugely important and so is how you feel about yourself. There are a number of simple visualisation techniques you can be taught to use to make you feel confident and capable. Breathing techniques can be employed to lessen nerves and loosen the vocal cords.

With effective training and a good deal of practice the fear of presentation can soon be replaced with the relish of performing and the success that follows.

Voice at Work

SPECIAL OFFER to AWS Members

The training company Voice at Work is offering a **TWO FOR ONE OFFER** to members of the AWS.

Business journalist and trainer Wendy Smith and actress and voice coach Kate Terris hold in-house training sessions on vocal skills and presentation techniques. Women in particular sometimes feel they need support with their voices when they are younger to give them gravitas and when they are older to bring renewed confidence (after a career break for example). For more information visit www.voiceatwork.co.uk, and remember to mention LINK when you make an enquiry.

“Ah, a Young Ms - Cheap and won't stay!”

National Committee member **Christl Hughes** attended a session at the recent EWLA (European Women Lawyers Association) Congress which included discussion of the exodus of women from the profession. She shares her thoughts with LINK magazine.

I thought I'd heard it all...

Prior to this workshop, after a long time in the High Street I thought I'd heard it all on this topic but I discovered there was more.

As many of us are only too aware, 1 in 3 female solicitors now leaves our profession for good within 5 years after qualification. The founders of our Association 86 years ago were concerned with entry. Now the issue is retention. Since 1997 every year more women than men are admitted as solicitors but they do not stay.

The main speaker at this particular EWLA workshop was Professor Vittorio Olgiatei of University of Urbino in Italy. The discussion was wide-ranging and I learnt that the pay differential, maternity leave, flexible working and perceived lack of commitment issues are all relevant but there is more to it than that.

Mysterious disappearances

The loss of female talent is not exclusively a UK issue for example. Statistics show it happening all over Europe. A small number of leavers transfer into related work such as law teaching but most disappear altogether. To where? And why?

It has always been suggested that the problem was largely confined to the City of London and better in the region, but this was debunked as a myth.

The problem is not always identified because it is believed that many employers take the line given as the title of this article. Law seems to be the 'default' University degree particularly for girls. There is always therefore a regular flow of newly qualified female solicitors. "When this one leaves she can be replaced quickly and cheaply." This can thus define the young woman from day 1.

Day to day reality

Young recruits have a poor appreciation of the reality of legal

life and practice. Too many students (both women and men) still think it is all about Court room drama, and see themselves as Stephen Fry in 'Kingdom'. At University girls are more likely to identify problems and seek help than boys and their degree results are better. But it was suggested that the legal education and training itself stresses for example the confrontational approach the male lawyer and usually the client wants rather than the collaborative/conciliation stance which might be better. The suggestion is that this form of differing treatment is endemic and institutionalised at such an early stage.

Writing with the wrong hand

It is controversial to say it, but nevertheless a truism that women are designed to be able to care rather than fight, to nurture rather than hard sell, to proceed gently and carefully rather than constantly steaming ahead into uncharted waters.

The typical caller to Law Care the health and support service for lawyers is a young woman or a middle aged man. So in youth **he** is able to grit his teeth in the face of adversity and/or shake it off on the rugby pitch but **she** departs. He stays but may encounter problems later on...

A lighter note

In the evening I attended the Gala Dinner at the House of Lords and was seated with two retired lady advocates from Finland and a party of young female Hungarian attorneys. The conversation was mostly in English although we did lapse occasionally into French. When I asked what they wanted to see before going home however I understood their response perfectly. They were unanimous ... Mamma Mia!!!

Membership of EWLA

Membership of EWLA is €100 for individuals an (€25 for students). Email: info@ewla.org, website: www.ewla.org.