

## FINDING YOUR VOICE

Do you remember the first time you heard a recording of your own voice? Going back to that moment now, what went through your mind? Were you shocked or pleasantly surprised? Did you expect you'd sound like that?

Most people respond the same way. When they hear themselves on tape, they get a bit uncomfortable and will tell you: "That's doesn't sound like me at all. Who is that person? Did I just say that?"

People tend to become very self-conscious and self-critical. Why? Because most of us don't have a clue how other people perceive the sound of our voice. How could we?

We hear ourselves from the inside 24/7. We're locked into our own little world thinking that - because we perceive ourselves a certain way- others hear what we hear and will respond accordingly.

As a media trainer, I spent many years coaching people on how to prepare for interviews on radio and TV. My favorite part was taking a CEO to a studio and putting him or her in front of a few camera's and blinding lights, while I would ask innocent questions.

When the interview was over, I'd say to them: "Well, how do you think you did?"

Nine out of ten times, they'd tell me: "Pretty good. I run a multi-million dollar business, you know. I'm used to speaking in public. I don't really think I need any media coaching. What's for lunch?"

Then I would play the tape back to them, without sound.

I would watch them closely as they were watching themselves. I could see the color fade from their faces. Some people would turn away. Some were utterly embarrassed. Others would tell me: "That's so mean of you! This is not fair."

Staring at that person on television, it was as if they were watching themselves naked. The unforgiving camera exposed every micro muscle movement, every time they unknowingly scratched their nose or rolled their eyes balls; every drop of sweat, every clenched fist and every nervous tick.

After these two minutes of terror, I'd ask them again: "So, how do you think you did?"

At that moment, I could see the penny drop, as these high-level business executives became aware of the huge disconnect between how they thought they came across, and they way the world was watching them.

Things they'd never noticed before became a big deal: a button missing from a shirt, a small stain on a tie, dandruff, nose hair, noisy jewelry, clogged mascara...

It's interesting what happens when we hold up a mirror. Seeing oneself through the eyes of someone else can feel like a cold morning shower. It's refreshing, it wakes you up but it's not necessarily enjoyable.

Now, think about your job for a moment and the way you present yourself. You're the CEO of your own freelance empire. Do you honestly know how you come across? Do your words, your body language and your tonality all say the same thing or is it a confusing mismatch?

Would you like to know?

**Here's your assignment for the next two days.**

1. Get out your voice recorder and if you don't have one, most cell phones will allow you to record your voice.
2. In a moment I will ask you to talk about the aspect of your business you're most passionate about for one minute and record it. It doesn't really matter what you say, as long as you are enthusiastic. Once you're done, put it away and -this is crucial- do NOT listen to it. Forgedaboudit!
3. 24 hours later, I'd like you to listen to your recording and be brutally honest. What's the first thing you notice as you listen to yourself? What's the emotion behind the words? Did it come anywhere close to enthusiasm? Do you really hear someone who is passionate about work, or do you hear someone trying too hard to show some enthusiasm? Or are you utterly underwhelmed and unmoved?

In my experience, most people (and when I say most I mean more than half), don't come anywhere close to what they believe to be enthusiasm. They just talk loud and fast. If that's the case, don't blame it on the recorder. That's just a lifeless tool. You're the boss and it's your voice.

4. If you were your own coach, what tips would you give yourself to spice things up a little and put some pizzazz into your presentation? Next, try these things out. Really get into it. Use your whole body. Most people lack enthusiasm because they're not even trying. You know better than that

You can't expect a client to be enthusiastic about what you have to offer if you come across as if you're not. Contrary to public opinion, a great product does not sell itself. Ask Steve Jobs!

Becoming aware of how you come across is just the first step. Step two is making adjustments. Some of us are really good at that and others could use some professional guidance. It really

helps to have a neural set of ears of someone who isn't afraid to push your buttons and boundaries and draw you out of your shell.

And do yourself a favor: save that very first recording and listen to it a year from now. I already know what you're going to say:

"That's doesn't sound like me at all. Who is that person?"

At that point you know you've found your voice.

***Paul Strikwerda* © 2011**