



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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 [Print-Friendly Article](#)

 [Search Back Issues](#)

Contents

 [Vocal Pace and Tone Can Make or Break Your Presentation!](#)

 [Chairperson's Column: An Entrepreneurial Actuary's Web Resource](#)

 [Eight Tips to Establish Professional Boundaries](#)

 [How to Get Prospects to Take Action](#)

SOA ePoll

Which feature would you most like to see in a networking Web site for the EA Section?

- Profiles of Section members describing what services they provide
- Postings of projects for which Section members are seeking assistance
- Postings by Section members seeking peer review help
- Postings by providers outside the Section describing their services
- None - I would not be interested in this Web site

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Vocal Pace and Tone Can Make or Break Your Presentation!

by Paula Lyons



Giving a "wow" presentation is about so much more than doing your research, analyzing your audience and selecting the cool facts, statistics, examples and anecdotes that will be most compelling and interesting. In fact, how you **SAY** all of those things matters just as much, if not more! The way you use the many aspects of your voice often determines how well you capture and hold the audience's attention.

When I cover this topic in coaching, clients often admit they hate the sound of their own voice on their outgoing voice mail message. But probe a little deeper, and most say they have recorded that message over and over until it sounds acceptable at the very least.

I am always fascinated that clients take the time to do *that*, but give little thought to the sound of their voice in meetings or in presentations!

Your voice is part of your personal signature. It is a powerful instrument and speaks volumes about your confidence, conviction and ability to persuade. It is designed to convey not only meaning, but also different levels of interest, enthusiasm and energy.

Still, in her book *Voice Power: Using Your Voice to Captivate, Persuade and Command Attention*, author Renee Grant-Williams explains that most of us "take our voices for granted. This is the voice I was born with, so this is the voice I'm stuck with."

And while it is true that you cannot completely restructure your vocal chords, you absolutely can improve various aspects of your voice! Again, Grant-Williams points out that you are born with a certain kind of hair too. But that doesn't stop you from styling and restyling it so that you look your very best.

You can do the same with your voice.

For example, do you speak too fast? So fast that people have a hard time understanding you? Or do you speak slowly so that the audience sees no

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energy or passion in your delivery? Do you speak without pauses or without variation in your pace? Does your tone suggest appropriate interest, excitement, or concern, or does it simply put people to sleep?

All of these issues can be fixed with the help of electronics and some concentrated practice. Here are some tips we always share with clients:

- Get a tape recorder!
- Use it in the privacy of your own home or office to record your voice in everyday conversations with friends, family or even your end of a business conversation.
- Use it especially to practice and to record your business presentations. (Recorders today are so small that it's easy to hide them from view.)
- You will then have a baseline understanding of how you sound both in natural conversation and in more formal settings.
- Analyze: What do you like about your voice and your vocal delivery? What don't you like?
- Experiment! Try different paces and tones while recording. Go beyond what feels comfortable just to hear what it sounds like. You may be surprised to learn that something that felt a bit over the top actually makes you sound more confident or more interesting.
- Don't forget to experiment with pausing after important thoughts or concepts, or to signal a change of topic or direction. Usually, when you play that back you realize that no pause is ever as long as it felt to you in the moment. This fact is important to recognize because pauses actually help audiences digest what you've just said and make you appear comfortable and in command.
- Finally, seek feedback from someone you trust after implementing new vocal techniques.

Soon, you will be well on your way to developing a reputation as one of the better speakers around. Remember, you are as good as you decide to be.

Paula Lyons is an executive coach and senior communications consultant with Bates Communications. A sought-after speaker, writer, coach and media expert, she provides her clients with the advice of a veteran who has experienced both sides of the podium and platform. Her background in television, radio, public speaking and performance helps the executives she coaches develop the skills to deliver powerful messages with an effective communication style. Contact Paula by visiting www.bates-communications.com.

[[return to top](#)]