

Chapter 2

What Are the Benefits?

How can The Voice Dynamic Approach help you in your personal or professional life? The answer is simple -- greater self-esteem. Good voice training results in feeling more confident, sounding more mature and experiencing greater relaxation in public speaking.

Articles written today on increasing a company's productivity all agree on one basic principle: those businesses which are most successful value their employees' self-esteem and usually provide avenues for bettering that image. In the long run, it means higher revenue and greater yields for the company.

Everyone in business is selling something. Be it the appliance dealer pressuring us to take out the 5-year warranty, the lawyer assuring us of the defendant's innocence, or the advertising agent predicting percentage of sales increase with the right jingle, essentially, we all have a product that we need to sell. However, before that item or idea can be sold, we first need to sell ourselves.

If your husband doesn't listen to you with quite as much enthusiasm as he did when you first met, could it be the sound of your voice? To live with a continual whining, squeaking, nasal or even childlike voice will eventually stop any man from listening.

If, on the other hand, your wife constantly asks you to repeat yourself, isn't it time you stopped mumbling? Andrew, an executive with a large pharmacy chain, finally admitted that he was a mumblor. For years his wife had been complaining about her inability to hear him and he didn't believe her. When his company sent him to me to clear up the mumbling, he

realized that she had been right after seeing his immovable lips on video. Today Andrew is amazed at the change his life has taken just by opening his mouth. He is looked upon with greater respect.

In working with my clients, I record them reading a particular passage at our first session and then again at our final session. In these 'before & after' videos not only do they sound better, but they look better too. Nothing about their physical appearance has changed; however, knowing they have control over the voice (and enjoying that new and improved sound!) shows not only in their faces but in how they carry themselves. A good example is a woman named Pat who walks differently today. Before starting my course, she sounded like a child, even at times resorting to 'baby-talk' with her colleagues. After Pat had completed the training, her peers told me that in addition to sounding mature, she now walks with purpose: she is proud of herself and it shows in her deportment.

There is a wonderful scene in the film **Superman, The Movie**, in which Clark Kent is standing in the living room of Lois Lane's apartment. She is in another room and he is about to tell her that he is Superman. He takes off his glasses, corrects his posture from that of Kent's slouched shoulder demeanor to the strong, erect bearing of Superman, and addresses her in this wonderfully dynamic and resonant voice. Suddenly he changes his mind, along with his mien, and reverts to Clark Kent: his pitch goes up, his voice loses its depth and richness and his shoulders slump as he changes back to the role of the wimp (although an ever-so-sweet one!).

Something similar happens in the first of the **Police Academy** movies. One of the supporting actresses, playing the role of a flighty 'bimbo,' finally makes an arrest at the end of the film. Her whole being has changed, but what is most noticeable is what she does with her voice. While she had previously sounded like an incompetent 'air-heard,' in nabbing

the crook she lowers her pitch and emits an unbelievably authoritative tone that makes not only her fellow cadets stand back in awe but also the bad guy.

Keep in mind, finding your best voice does not mean a voice that is overbearing or domineering but one that commands respect. A few years ago, a young man phoned me and told me that he was hoping to become a policeman; that he wanted to be able to say, "Stop! Police!" and be believed. At least 6'3" with a gentle disposition, Phil got what he wanted. When he says, "Stop! This is the Police!" they believe him.

One of my most surprising changes was Craig, a highly motivated young man who also wanted to be a policeman. Craig was taking every course conceivable to prepare himself for acceptance into the police academy. When he first enrolled in voice training, his father said that it would be a waste of time and money; however, at his third session, Craig's dad felt that this course was the best investment his son had made! The change in Craig's voice was one of the most dramatic and dynamic I have ever heard. [You can see a 'before & after' video clip of Craig at www.voicedynamic.com.]

After graduating from college and before changing the sound of my voice, I worked for a tour operator, selling packaged vacations over the telephone. My supervisor, a former priest who had taught English at a Catholic seminary, had a deep, resonant voice that was absolutely captivating. Without a doubt, Harry had an excellent sales technique, but what truly grabbed the listener's attention was his exquisite voice. And because of his sound, his success was unquestionable. I, on the other hand, managed to last three months in that particular vocation. There is no doubt in my mind that I sounded too young: my voice lacked authority and confidence.

Today more than ever, we are concerned with our image; and, most professional people realize that making a good impression can ultimately influence the outcome of their business dealings. We join Toastmasters, take presentation courses, learn business etiquette, and have someone design our wardrobes; however, no importance has been attached to the sound of the speaking voice. In some cases, the voice is our only means of recognition if our work is handled by means of the telephone. How many times have you formed a mental picture of someone on the phone and were later surprised when you finally met that person face to face? Your image of that individual may have been quite a contrast to the real thing.

Some years ago I was holding a workshop in Detroit and a woman phoned me to enroll for the session. When I heard her voice on the phone, I thought I was speaking to a teenager. At one point she asked if she could bring her daughter and my immediate reaction was that she was planning to bring along an infant. When I asked the age of the child, she said her daughter was 22 and that she was 44. Yes, I was shocked! I can't tell you how many women have come to me with the same problem: when they answer the telephone, the caller asks to speak to their mother.

The image one's voice projects is not just a problem for women. One evening a man phoned me and told me his name was Fernando. I thought that I had heard him wrong: I assumed his name was Fernanda because he sounded like a woman. We spoke for quite a while and he told me a lot about himself; as our conversation progressed, I became convinced that this might be a man. I asked him his name again and he said Fernando. Because we had developed a good rapport and I felt comfortable with him at that stage, I told him that I had thought he was a woman. He said he knew that because everyone thought he was a woman on the phone.

Not only do I have male clients who sound like women, I also work with women who sound like men. The good news is that both extremes can be rectified. With the men, we lower the pitch; with the women, we raise it.

Before I had met my son's junior kindergarten teacher, she phoned me one evening during one of my classes. My three clients, all men, had been working on establishing optimum pitch. Having been surrounded for an hour with those lovely deep sounds, I was truly shocked when I answered the phone during our break and heard the teacher's voice. It was high-pitched, breathy and very soft dynamically, sounding like that of a child. My first reaction was that this was a joke initiated by one of the men. I was so stunned that her words never registered. After several moments of absolute disbelief, I realized that the call was legitimate. My second thought was that this woman, who I assumed was fresh out of school, could definitely use some voice training.

Upon meeting the teacher the next week, I discovered that she was in her fifties. While I don't agree with that voice in dealing with adults, I must admit that for the 4-year-old, the child-like quality of her voice works. My advice? Keep the young voice if you are reading to your kids at night; however, if your intention is to make the best impression possible, either in your professional or personal life, remember that a high-pitched voice is irritating and, in the long run, a turnoff. The same holds true for a man.

The ability to increase your volume without shouting or yelling is known as projection and is only possible if you are breathing from your diaphragm. Anything else is excessive wear and tear on the vocal folds. A loud voice is just that. The louder it gets, the more it hurts the listener's ear especially over

the phone. A good test is to take a recording of heavy metal music and turn up the volume. It is ear-shattering. Now take a recording of classical music, turn up the volume, and note how much further you can increase the output without torturing your ears. Well-played symphonic music is very resonant; heavy metal is not and is not meant to be.

For the soft-spoken individual, voice training opens up a whole new world. I have a vivid recollection of two clients coming to me with the same results several years ago. It happened on a consecutive Monday and Tuesday. Monday's man told me that in the previous week he had been in conference and **had not been** interrupted when speaking: he had held the attention of the group. If you are not normally soft-spoken, you might not understand the significance of that statement. However, if your volume level tends to be soft, I just hit a nerve! Tuesday's woman expressed the same result. She had had her family over for dinner during the weekend, and, in sitting around the dining room table, she held the topic of conversation. That had never happened before. The pleasure in her face was an absolute joy to see. Here were two people, previously having been 'talked over,' who had both discovered that by increasing their volume, they increased their self-worth. This admittedly was an eye-opening experience for me.

After my move to Canada in the early 80's, I was approached by the University of Western Ontario to teach voice to the graduate students of journalism. In my years with Western, I honestly did not meet any student who had a serious problem with volume. These young people had dreams of being on television or the radio: they came in with big egos and big voices! It was not until I began working with business people that I found that many North Americans speak too softly resulting in lower self-esteem. If you are soft-spoken, you are being 'talked over' not because of what you're saying, but because those of us with bigger voices tire of straining to hear

you. We will overpower you. If you expect to be heard, you must increase your volume level!

Have you ever stood in front of a group of people to speak and found that upon opening your mouth your pitch went up, your throat constricted, you were breathless, and generally you wanted to die? I have more good news for you. Breathing from the diaphragm controls those nervous jitters we all experience when we're in the limelight.

While many speech courses offer psychological tricks in dealing with nervousness, I prefer the physical. It is said that to control his nervousness in public speaking, Winston Churchill was told to imagine his audience sitting in their underwear. That bothers me. I wouldn't want to speak to a group who were sitting in their underwear! Obviously it worked for Churchill but it would not work for me. It would only add to my nervousness!

When I first started my business, I joined our local Chamber of Commerce. At the new members' orientation meeting, we had to stand, introduce ourselves and briefly describe our business. There were at least 100 people at that meeting and I was one of the last to speak. To say I was nervous was an understatement because it quickly dawned on me that the ***sound of my voice was my business***. If I blew it, I could kiss Voice Dynamic goodbye. That was tremendous pressure. When I stood to make my introduction, I just breathed normally (that means from the diaphragm!) and proceeded to sound calm, cool and in control. No one knew that my heart was pounding in my face and ears or that my knees were shaking (there was a tablecloth, thank you!). There is a TV commercial that says, "Never let them see you sweat." Agreed. However, never let them 'hear' you sweat either!

If you are a senior citizen, there is the possibility that you sound old; with good breath support you should be able to eliminate the age in your voice. For the younger individual I have some marvelous news. Breathing with the support of your diaphragm means that your voice will not age. We certainly all slow down as we get older, but because you are eliminating the wear and tear on the vocal folds, your age will not be given away by the sound of your voice.

One of the most frustrating problems for many people is that for most of their life they sound too young; then, they sound old. Good voice training means a voice that is ageless. As much as I may wish I still looked twenty, I'm so glad I don't sound that age or younger still! Likewise, when I'm eighty, I may look it but I'm not going to sound like an old lady! Listen to those radio announcers with dynamic voices. Can you place an age on them?

Since changing my own voice in 1977, it has only improved through the years. In 1981 I made some commercials for the Aspen Music Festival -- if you compare the voice then to my voice today, the latter is bigger, deeper, and rounder. And for any of you who sing, you will find that your singing voice will also improve. While you may discover a greater range, you will definitely know a larger, fuller voice. If you do sing, by all means incorporate the breathing exercises that you will be learning in *Diaphragmatic Breathing* into your singing voice.

Many people come to me because of vocal abuse, a subject that could be a book in itself. In simple terms vocal abuse is misuse of the voice which can lead (or has already led)

to permanent damage of the vocal folds. If chronic misuse of the voice has not yet developed into polyps, nodes or scarring of the vocal folds, then The Voice Dynamic Approach will be very beneficial. Good voice training is a preventative, not a cure for permanent damage. If you have been experiencing chronic hoarseness, chronic sore throats, or a change in quality of the speaking or singing voice, I urge you to see an otalaryngologist (an ear, nose, & throat specialist).

I worked with a teacher who had polyps on her vocal folds and instead of surgery, her doctor recommended she stop talking for three months. The doctor's advice worked: the polyps disappeared. Beth then worked with me so that she could learn to project her voice in class to avoid that problem again. Unfortunately, that advice doesn't work for everyone.

When it comes to misuse of the voice, we find the vocal apparatus in every person very individual. Some people can mistreat the voice their entire life and not do any damage whatsoever. Ethel Merman is a very good example. A 'Broadway Belter', this actress sang without amplification for 50 years and did not hurt her voice – although I am sure there were times when she was hurting some of her listeners ears!

Julie Andrews, a legitimate voice however, was on Broadway for only 2 years in *Victor, Victoria* and she did permanent damage. Andrews sued her doctors after they removed the nodules from her vocal folds because she had lost the elasticity of those folds which limited her range and her ability to hold notes. I do not question Ms. Andrews' suing of her doctors; I question any ear, nose, & throat specialist who would guarantee a return of the former singing voice after doing surgery on those delicate organs.

While Julie Andrews has always supported her sound, age and overuse of her vocal folds took their toll on her voice. Had she not done Broadway for those two years when she was in her sixties, it is possible she would still be singing today.

How much abuse can your voice take? I attend a lot of soccer games and the goalies often stand there yelling, giving orders to their team throughout the entire 90 minutes. For some of these players, the damage will be permanent (and you can hear it); for others, they will experience no problems. The same goes for the coaches.

Another area of improvement will be your diction, in most cases, without conscious effort. Cleaner articulation is one of the many benefits of breathing properly and controlling your speed.

In the musical, *My Fair Lady*, the esteemed professor of elocution, Henry Higgins, sings, "There even are places where English completely disappears; while in America, they haven't used it [the English language] in years." Higgins was referring to the fact that we English-speaking North Americans are lazy in our diction (as well as our very limited vocabulary). We often drop the **g** on words ending in **ing**; we slide over multi-syllable words. It takes a bit more work to say it properly; but it sounds so much better.

I once saw an interview with John F. Kennedy, Jr. who said the word *gentlemen* as *genemen*. The **t** and **l** were never enunciated. And that was from a most well-educated young man! We Americans could definitely use some work on our articulation.

Sometimes people will seek my help because their voices are a monotone. Color is very individual, displaying the emotion in the voice, on the face and in one's entire body language. A very small percentage of the population shows

absolutely no color or life in their expression whatsoever. In order to cure this problem, the individual must shed the inhibitions holding back those emotions. This requires breaking old habits and establishing new ones.

Many people, on the other hand, are colorful in conversation but, on the podium, lose their excitement or emotion because of excessive nervousness. Once they can control the nervousness and learn to speak *to* their audience and not *at* them, we find their color returning. One of my clients, a senior partner of a prestigious law firm, had no problem displaying color in the courtroom; but, when asked to make a formal presentation to a group of realtors regarding real estate law, he phoned me, was quite frantic and actually stammered over the phone, admitting that he could not stand up and speak to a group in that situation. We worked quite intensely the next evening. When I played back his video, he saw a very stiff and boring delivery and realized the need to relax and ‘let go.’ The results were dramatic! In fact he phoned immediately after his speech the following day and told me that it had gone very well; and, that he had actually enjoyed doing it. Here was a man who two days prior had been convinced he could not give this presentation.

Besides all of these wonderful benefits, you will also find that a resonant voice is very sensual. A voice lacking resonance is cold. When the typical 'dumb blond' image is portrayed, the voice which emerges is anything but warm or sensual. Yes, initially one might be attracted to the body or face, but do you honestly want to listen to that voice every day? The voices of James Earl Jones, Diane Sawyer, George Clooney, Kate Beckinsale, Sean Connery, Cher, and Peter Coyote have one thing in common: each voice resounds with

warmth and sensuality. It is not surprising that with the arrival of the "talkies" in the 1920's, many actors lost their jobs. You can believe that voice training became a very serious business in Hollywood in that decade!

Since approaching the business community with Voice Dynamic, I have heard receptionists, secretaries, managers, and even chief executive officers who are sadly in need of help. Some have been very receptive; some haven't, assuming that voice training is just another speech course. I cannot emphasize enough that training the speaking voice is a very specialized field, similar to a music lesson. The vocal folds are an instrument and should be treated as such.

When people hear about my business for the first time, they sometimes regard it as the icing on the cake. I beg to differ. Voice training is a fundamental building block. Just as we don't teach potential hockey players to shoot the puck until they have successfully learned how to stand up on skates, why do we teach people how to make speeches if they have no control over the sound of their voice. I heartily support those courses dealing in presentation skills and speechmaking. Their value is undeniable; however, if you can't project your voice (and I don't mean speak loudly!), or if you are over 21 and sound younger than 21, all the speech practice in the world isn't going to improve your sound.

Recently I held a final session with one of my weekend workshop groups. At the original workshop, one of the participants had been very soft-spoken with a high-pitched voice. He was so nervous making his presentation that his hands shook visibly and his face was as white as death. He was petrified! A month later, however, he stood confidently in front of the group and spoke in a wonderfully resonant voice that was

considerably larger and deeper: it was hard to believe that this was the same man we had seen and heard a month earlier. Barry told us that in those last four weeks he had found his clients listening more intently to him; he was closing business deals at the first meeting (which apparently had not happened before); and more of his conditions were being met in negotiating contracts. He felt that he was being taken more seriously and with more professionalism: his increased self-esteem garnered him respect.

The great Roman orator, Cicero, said, "Without effective delivery, a speech of the highest mental capacity can be held in no esteem, while one of the moderate abilities, with this qualification, may surpass even those of the highest talent." Cicero's understanding of the value of the delivery tells us that through the years, mankind has always attached much significance to how we say it, not just what we say.

Many years ago while in an airplane, former President Clinton was speaking to the press who were waiting for him on the ground. There was a great deal of noise in the plane and Clinton had difficulty being heard so he shouted in response to the reporters' questions. Interestingly enough, those on the ground heard anger in his voice and printed as much in the next morning's papers. Clinton wasn't mad and later said so. If he had had the ability to project his voice instead of shouting, however, they would not have perceived him as being angry.

If you have yelled at your children in the past, once you learn how to project, you will find them actually listening to you. Children 'tune us out' when we yell; but they will sit up and take notice if you can project your voice with authority. The same holds true for pets. Dogs and cats respond to the tone of the voice, not what you say to them. If I tell my dog that she is a bad dog, but say it lovingly, she will come to me. Likewise, if there is anger in my voice, she will cower under the coffee table.

As I mentioned earlier, if you sing, you should notice a difference in your singing voice. Your range could broaden and your volume increase as will your ability to sing very softly or pianissimo, because you are gaining greater control over your breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing in speaking is the same diaphragmatic breathing in song.

The 'Unvoiced' Benefits

While this book is intended to show you how to achieve a dynamic, mature-sounding voice, that which makes it all possible is diaphragmatic breathing. What's fascinating about this technique is that you will soon discover that supported breathing will not only improve the quality of your voice, but it can also improve the quality of your life. I have learned this through my teaching and the interesting responses I have heard from my clients, regarding the numerous benefits they have received that have nothing to do with the voice. They handle stress better, not only in their business but also in their personal lives. Some sleep better at night. For most people, it truly changes their life in some fashion. What you will gain through deep supported breathing is the ability to control that breathing and your voice. It's a fabulous feeling; it's a relaxed feeling; it's a strength; and, if you do it correctly, it will give you a tool that you have never before experienced.

People who are involved in sports, athletics, aerobics or any other physical activity will discover that they have more endurance and greater control again by breathing with support. It certainly is an absolute for yoga! At first you will do this consciously; but, once it is a habit, you won't have to think about it again. A professional golfer, who came to me for work in presentation skills, found that breathing with support when she addresses the ball has improved her drive -- in Patty's case,

her income is directly related to how well she hits the ball. What a wonderful benefit for this woman, a professional golfer, who had only wanted to feel more relaxed in public speaking!

Rod, a lawyer and a long distance runner, found that when he concentrated on breathing while jogging, he was able to run 15 minutes longer, although his leg muscles were not prepared for that extra mileage! There is no doubt that if you apply diaphragmatic breathing to any sport in which you participate, you will notice an improvement in strength, endurance, speed and control.

If I were to poll my clients, they would all agree that one of the greatest benefits of voice training is that they feel better about themselves. There is no doubt that they feel more confident -- and if you feel good about yourself, you will present a more positive, a more dynamic image. Is The Voice Dynamic Approach for you? Ask yourself the following questions.

1. Does the sound of your voice on recording equipment embarrass, shock, offend or disgust you?
2. Do you sound like a child or a teenager and are over twenty-one?
3. Does your pitch go up when you speak to a group?
4. Does your voice quiver or shake when you speak to a group?
5. Do you run out of air when you speak to a group?
6. Does your voice tire at the end of the day or after a presentation?
7. Do your shoulders rise when you take a deep breath?
8. Do the muscles or tendons in your neck tighten when you breathe?

9. Does your jaw become sore after prolonged speaking?
10. Do people often interrupt you?
11. Do you talk in a monotone?
12. Do you shout/yell when increasing your volume?

If you answered **yes** to any of the questions above, please read on!