



Knowledge Transfer

Voices That Work

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Module 6

Pitching Voice Work to the Business Client

BY PHIL BLISS

The full list of modules available are:

Module 1

"An Introduction to Voice" Basic Voice Exercises – by Kate Pringle

Module 2

The Universal / Generic Voice – by Veronica Allardice

Module 3

An Example of Good Practice: "The Reflective Practitioner" – by John Tucker
Derived from "Female to male transgender project" Spring 2006

Module 4

Best Practice in Lesson Planning for Bespoke / Client Focused Training – by Emma Brown

Module 5

The Importance of Spoken English Skills Training in the Business Setting – by Phil Bliss

Module 6

Pitching Voice Work to the Business Client – by Phil Bliss

Module 7

"An Introduction to Voice" Basic Voice Exercises – by Kate Pringle
Creating Environments that Support Sustainable Learning – by Nick Owen

Module 8

Performance Skills for the Non-Performer – by Emma Brown.

Introduction

The ability to communicate effectively in all areas of our lives can be dependant upon how confident we are as users of our voice. As individuals we possess a broad array of skills and talents but the inability to get our thoughts, our feelings, our desires and our messages across effectively to our “audiences” can hold us back. The ability to retrain our own voices and the voices of others can be challenging, empowering and creatively very exciting.

In the article that follows, an experienced voice and professional development trainer offers advice on techniques and strategies that will allow you to develop your own style of training to be most effective for the groups you are working with. We hope that by studying and putting into practice the approaches described, you will be able to enable your trainees/learners/clients to benefit from coaching that is integrated into personal and professional development programmes.

There are some important messages and caveats to bear in mind as you approach the material and work practically on your own voice and the voices of others. The following is a bullet point list of things to consider when you begin to integrate elements of voice coaching into your practice.

1. **Accessibility** – An understanding of the voice and the physical and psychological factors that effect how well we communicate is accessible to all trainers and can be incorporated into any training delivery. However, professional voice coaches undergo a significant amount of training. It is recommended that the practitioner undergo specific training before seeking work as a “voice coach”.
2. **Health and Safety** – Voice training is a physical process. As such, you must ensure that the health and safety of your group is supported. Those whose voice is damaged by prolonged misuse should be referred to a medical professional or speech therapist in the first instance.

3. **Making it your Own** – The theory and practice of voice training has been evolving for many years. There are no perfect or ideal exercises for any one group or situation. Take the exercises you think would work for you and make them your own.
4. **Being Patient** – The way we speak and communicate is hard wired by our experience. The muscles of speech and some of our thought processes therefore must be retrained. This process will take time and may happen in small increments or larger steps. Make sure you record progress and keep your trainees moving forward through feedback and encouragement.
5. **Reflecting on your Practice** – As a trainer, it is important that you reflect on your methods of delivery, how you connect with your training groups and what works/what doesn't. Again, take the material presented and use it so it suits your own development as a trainer to the benefit of your learners.

Approaching the Material

- > All modules contain questions to prompt reflection and discussion of issues raised in the text.
- > Symbols in the margin show where listening (ear) speaking (mouth) and physical (body) exercises are featured.
- > If you wish to obtain other modules in this series of articles about voice training, please refer to other titles shown in the inside front cover and contact kt@cssd.ac.uk for copies.

If you have any questions or comments about the material or ideas presented, please contact Charlie Cunningham or Paul Nicholl at The Central School of Speech and Drama (CSSD) on 0207 559 3936 or email kt@cssd.ac.uk.



Module 6

Pitching Voice Work to the
Business Client

BY PHIL BLISS

Introduction

There is amongst the population in general a degree of ignorance, or at least misunderstanding, as to what voice-coaches can offer. In January 2006, Bruce Wooding of the Central School of Speech and Drama commissioned a short film to document the public's perception of what voice coaches do. The interviews demonstrated how few people are aware of what voice coaching aims to do. The film illustrated in particular that we as voice coaches must never assume that people either know or understand our work. It is part of our job to educate and even sell the benefits of voice coaching. This is true in all sectors– even, in my experience, with drama students – but particularly in the business world.

There are some excellent voice practitioners already working in the business environment. Evidence suggests that there is plenty of untapped potential in the field. This is because our economy is focused more than ever on the exchange of goods, products and services. Business is recognising the value and importance of the method of exchange which is, in many instances, vocal. Government has also recognised this and has identified communication skills training as a priority.

I interviewed a number of my clients – in manufacturing, management/finance consultancy, local government and the charity sector – to find out whether or not they saw a future for voice training in business. The overall picture was positive. David Dunkley, Senior Manager at Grant Thornton said:

“Yes [I see a future for voice in business]. I work in an environment which previously relied on long, detailed and carefully crafted reports. This is no longer the case and clients do not have time to read such documents; they expect us to present findings to them. Therefore voice is key”.

“This situation is exaggerated when the presentation is done by way of a conference call – in that situation the only tool you have is voice – the shirt, tie, body language count for nothing.” Another client, Agostinho de Jesus, Training Co-ordinator at Wandsworth Borough Council stated that; “There is a very strong future for voice in business as we are all affected by how people talk to us”.

Securing voice coaching work in business is a long term process where understanding the client's needs and how they like to receive information is essential. As Christina Viol, the Communication Competence Manager at Airbus puts it:

“Given the enormous pressures, coaching managers on their voice is, I'm afraid to say, of least importance when it comes to offering training courses in the context of the overall training programme”.

This statement illustrates the business realities that must be dealt with in approaching most new clients. Christina did concede:

“However, in individual cases... [voice-coaching] could be extremely helpful”.

There is then, a place for voice in business. To develop ourselves to inhabit this place we need to be creative, adaptive and clear about what it is we offer. Where we are now could be compared with where drama-based training and role-play was fifteen years ago.. This type of training is now known, understood and widely used in business. Janet Rawson, co-founder of Steps, one of the foremost companies in this field, recently said to me:

“When we started, we knew that the use of theatre based techniques would be useful to the business community – we just had to persuade them about this and be creative with its application. I suspect that voice in business is where drama-based learning in business was fifteen years ago. The possibilities, for voice, are endless.”

Need Versus Time and Budget

Before I outline my recommendations for how to approach voice in business, I want to first point out the need for simplicity. In a lot of voice coaching you face the issue of need versus time and budget. This means that in most cases you are forced to condense your knowledge into what seems like little more than sound-bites. This distillation of knowledge is most exemplified in the work that the Voice Care Network engages in with teachers. The importance and relevance of voice training to the teaching profession is clear, but the reality is that most teachers are lucky if they get a half a day's voice training in their whole career. Although the teachers probably have the worst of it – given their greater need and tightest budget – all applications of voice in business, whether in the private or public sector, will have time and budgetary constraints. Therefore some core recommendations for approaching the work are;

- Focus on the specific needs of the client.
- Plan the session in detail.
- Design a concise hand-out for this particular client group.
- Decide what you can realistically cover in the time given – don't be over ambitious. Less is more.

These enforced time constraints can be frustrating, as you can never fit in all that you know may be of help. The discipline, however, enables you to become a more judicious, concise and focused coach.

Pitching.

What follows is by no means a comprehensive model of how to approach voice in business, but is intended as an over-view with some detailed hints. It is also designed to stimulate debate as to how you would present your own voice business. Always keep your ear to the ground- you will be amazed where the work comes in from.

The Long Game

When it comes to pitching for business do not expect immediate results. Business relationships take months, sometimes longer, to develop. All sorts of things get in the way, such as the absence of your relevant contact, holidays, budgets or permission from above. Sometimes it's just a matter allowing time for training ideas to permeate the client company. Remember; you have to fit your training to their ever-shifting schedules and training needs. So don't be put off by delays – it is just the nature of the beast. You must, in other words, be prepared to play the long game when it comes to pitching for business.

- Keep notes on each client.
- Be persistent but don't pester.
- Think how you can help them.
- Listen intently to hear their needs, not necessarily their wants.
- Don't tell them their business, tell them about yours.
- Think precisely what it is you are offering.
- Remember you are selling communication skills. Your ability to communicate your product has to be excellent, at the very least.
- Know your product down to the smallest detail. This is not the same as knowing your subject.

I asked the aforementioned clients (referred to now on as The Clients – see below*) if they had any suggestions to help the voice-coach when pitching for business. Here is what they said;

- "Empathy, in terms of why the coaching is required e.g. is it to make good a weakness or is it to improve on what is already a good quality speaking style. If the former, then using a voice coach can be somewhat nerve racking as it takes otherwise confident people beyond their comfort zone. Confidentiality is also important as for many, the knowledge that he/she is using a voice coach could be a sign of weakness" David Dunckley. Senior Manager. Grant Thornton. London Office. (FROM THIS POINT FORWARD – CLIENT 1)
- "Understanding the demographics of the workforce. The management ethos. Cost. Flexibility." Aghostinho de Jesus. Training Co-ordinator. Wandsworth Borough Council. (FROM THIS POINT FORWARD – CLIENT 2)
- "The Voice Coach should link effective use of voice to increased performance. Since use of voice is related to breathing and proper breathing enhances clarity of thought, this is key to delivering messages during any kind of presentation". Client 3. Christina Viol. Communications Competence Manager. Airbus. France. (FROM THIS POINT FORWARD – CLIENT 3)
- "Consistency, honesty, testimonials". John Duffy. Training and Development Co-ordinator. The Big Issue. London. (FROM THIS POINT FORWARD – CLIENT 4)

Setting out Your Stall

Professionalism, attention to detail and the ability to work with staff at any level will instil trust in your work. Practically, here are some other points to focus on;

- Clarity above all. Make sure that what you offer is clear and easy to understand. Do not alienate your potential clients with unnecessarily complex language, ideas or products.
- Avoid jargon.
- Spend a lot of time getting your website as good as it can be. Look up the competition.
- Get a proper logo – pay for it if you must – but don't just use capitals and colour.
- Only use your branded paper-work in all communication.

- Attention to detail. Check and re-check all written communication with clients – that includes emails.
- Reply instantly to requests.

Taking that last point – be prepared to jump when they need you to. I have often had clients who seemingly test your ability to respond quickly to their changing requirements.

To help you target your product and to give you some idea of what it is that business wants from us I asked The Clients,

“What one thing, in terms of added value, can the voice coach offer your business”?

They replied;

- “Gravitas / authority”. (Client 1)
- “Clearer communication”. (Client 2).
- “Clarity”. (Client 3).
- “Self-confidence”. (Client 4).

I also asked 20 other clients who were attending group voice sessions what they thought voice training can offer. In order of most mentions they were;

1. Confidence.
2. Clarity.
3. Communication Skills.
4. Presentation Skills.

The First Meeting.

- Be crystal clear about what it is you are specifically offering them.
- Pepper your presentation with practical demonstrations – this really helps.
- Take loads of notes – let the client do the talking.
- If possible, go in pairs – preferably male/female. Allow the client to talk to which ever one they prefer, let the other one take notes.
- Ask loads of questions.
- Always let them finish talking.
- Clothes and shoes – the best you can afford. Think about the sort of business it is and dress appropriately.
- Hand-outs – the best quality you can afford. Photocopies won’t do. Diagrams on headed paper. Present hand-outs in plastic folders.
- Carry plenty of business cards.
- Rehearse. Have a pre-meeting meeting.
- Give yourself ample time – there is no excuse for being late.
- Make proper introductions; make sure everyone in the room understands who you are and what it is that you do and make sure you understand who they are.
- Never take it for granted that they properly understand what it is that you offer – whether or not they have read your website or promotional material.

- Check how long you have got for the meeting. You can then plan it properly.
- At the end of the meeting it is your responsibility to say what happens next and arrange a contact date.

Fees

- Try not to get into figures at the meeting. Use ball parks if pushed. Best if the figures go into full proposal that you send out afterwards.
- Decide what figure is your minimum and don't go below it.
- If there is debate about the figures after you have sent them, send an email to confirm the reviewed costings.
- Don't be pressurised into making decisions about fees – get back to them within in an hour.
- Ask around for the going rate and place your fee in the middle. Don't over or under quote as you'll look a fool either way.
- It's impossible to have a fixed rate given all the different areas we work in. Be flexible.
- If you underquote and accept your quote, you will never feel happy delivering the work.

The Proposal

- Have a front sheet with company logo, course title, and the names and addresses of both yours and the client company.
- Inside, set things out with as much simplicity as possible – remember, too much information might scare them off. I would suggest something along the lines of;
 1. Give brief details of the history of the pitch. When contact was made etc.
 2. State what your understanding of their needs is and specifically what it is they have asked for.
 3. The timings; length of sessions and how many.
 4. Details of any forthcoming, arranged meetings.
 5. Who you or your company is; background, experience, clients, philosophy.
 6. Your standards, methodology and attitude.
 7. Project design; your ideas, with alternatives, in full. Use your notes from the meeting to tailor the training to their specific needs, available time and budget. Be clear about logistics such as; number of delegates, lengths of sessions, equipment, room size, what the delegates should wear and bring.
 8. A delivery time-table, as simple as;
 - 9.00 Breathing: Learn how breathing technique can save your presentation.
 - 10.00 Coffee
 - 10.15 Posture: Discover how poor body use affects the voice.
 9. Or, an over-view for each session, with headed paragraphs on each proposed training element. Along the lines of;
 - The Morning Session – 3 hours with one 15 minute break
 - Headings for paragraphs such as; How the voice works. Posture, Alignment And Breath.

Promotional Material

Offer promotional material before the work begins. Get a very clear idea of their training objectives then design the poster/leaflet for them. You are generally better placed to help “sell” the training within the company, than the person who did the purchasing. The company will love you for it and you will have a better attended and more focused group.

One-To-One

If the coaching is one-to-one, I would offer an initial 2 hour diagnostic session, followed by a series of further 2 hour sessions, the number of which depending on client need and budget.

Working in the highly competitive and results focused world of business has, in my experience, enormous benefits for all other fields of work. Firstly it raises your game.

There is, as I mentioned at the beginning, tremendous opportunities for the expansion of our work into the business world in both the public and private sectors. The high professional standards, creativity and adaptability of our work from pitch, through proposal, to delivery, will facilitate this migration of our work into new arenas. Good luck and I hope that this has been food for thought.

Appendix

This appendix outlines responses to various questions from the clients and contacts outlined below. (Data gathered August 2006.)

1. David Dunckley. Senior Manager. Grant Thornton. London Office.
2. Aghostinho de Jesus. Training Co-ordinator. Wandsworth Borough Council.
3. Christina Viol. Communications Competence Manager. Airbus. France.
4. John Duffy. Training and Development Co ordinator. The Big Issue. London office.
5. Janet Rawson. Co-founder. Steps. London.

Does Business need voice coaches?

1. In an increasingly competitive business environment then the answer inevitably has to be yes. In the UK, and particularly in London, business tends to be the provision of services rather than the provision of goods / products. These services being offered tend to be increasingly commoditised and thus any competitive advantage you have can be critical. In this case image, which a voice is central to, is key. In the service industry we sell ourselves and have no products to fall back on.
2. Business needs voice coaches to ensure that its members of staff are clearly understood.
3. Given the enormous pressure, coaching managers on their voice is, I'm afraid to say, of least importance when it comes to offering training courses in the context over the overall training curriculum. However, in individual cases for top

management, this could be extremely helpful provided, the manager recognises the need to improve his presentation skills. In fact, learning how to use the voice to enhance the effectiveness of your presentation is of primary importance, because it is an element of the overall image leader's project in public. Whether or not this image is authentic and credible depends on whether or not the message content and the message delivery are in synchrony.

4. Yes.
5. Absolutely, one hundred per cent.

What one thing, in terms of added value, can the voice coach offer your business?

1. Gravitas / authority or at least assist your chances of being perceived as having gravitas. Why should a very strong message be diluted by poor presentation / articulation? Unfortunately in the environment I work in, however strong the message I have to deliver, if it is delivered poorly then the argument is weakened.
2. Voice coaching can help members of staff communicate more clearly with residents and improve the services that we deliver.
3. Clarity for getting the message across.
4. Self confidence in being able to give a much better presentation to my clients.
5. For a drama based training company, such as Steps, it allows us to give our clients added value in aiding individuals with their growth within their companies. This could be for Clear Spoken English or in developing a strong voice as they move upwards in the career ladder of their organisation.

Do you have any suggestions to help the voice coach when pitching for business?

1. Empathy, in terms of why coaching is required e.g. is it to make good a weakness or is it to improve on what is already a good quality speaking style. If the former then using a voice coach can be somewhat nerve racking as it takes otherwise confident people beyond their comfort zone. Confidentiality is also important as for many, the knowledge that he / she is using a voice coach could be a sign of weakness.
2. Understanding the demographics of the workforce.
The management ethos.
Cost.
Flexibility.
3. He should link the effective use of voice to increased performances. Since use if voice is related to breathing and proper breathing enhances clarity of thought, this is key to delivering messages during any kind of presentation.
4. Consistency.
Honesty.
Testimonials.
- 5 See above.

Do you see a future for voice in business?

1. Yes, I work in an environment which previously relied on long, detailed and carefully crafted reports. This is no longer the case and clients do not have the time to read such documents; they expect us to present findings to them and therefore I cannot rely on the skills I have in report writing. Therefore, voice is key. This situation is exaggerated when that presentation, or indeed any other business, is done by way of conference call, in that situation the only tool you have is voice. The shirt, the tie, body language count for nothing.
2. There is a very strong future for voice in business as we are all affected by how people talk to us.
3. That's really difficult to say since, again, in the context of cost reduction and enormous work load, I expect the need to be rather limited. The most relevant audience in huge companies would be top management.
4. Massively, I think it is the future of business.
5. Most definitely.

Philip Bliss

B.A. hons. Principals Award. Guildford School of Acting.

Phil was an actor for fifteen years until he was asked to dialogue coach on TV commercials. This deepened his existing interest in the voice and lead to him working at Rose Bruford, teaching speech fundamentals and phonetics.

He now lectures at Brunel University – where they are expanding the provision for voice under his tuition. He also teaches at the London School of Musical Theatre and at The YWCA in Portland Place. He works on the knowledge transfer team at the Central School of Speech and Drama, where he is also a guest lecturer. His company, Bliss Voice Training works in partnership with Steps.

