

The Voice of Authority: How to Sound Like a Leader

By [Gary Genard](#)



Do you have the voice of authority and leadership when you speak? Here's how to sound like a leader who projects power and presence!

Speaking with a figurative “leader’s voice” is one thing. Imbuing your actual voice with the sound of leadership is another matter entirely.

We often hear about the voice of a leader in terms of vision. But much depends upon your ability to actually speak in a way that compels attentiveness, trust, and respect. I’m talking about the sound of your voice and the power and presence you project.

It’s possible to be weak-voiced and lead a company or organization. But in ways large and small, people will perceive you differently—and be more willing to follow you—when you invest the sound of your voice with the attributes of leadership.



The Dangers of Underperforming Vocally

Recently I worked with a client for whom vocal performance had become an overriding concern. She held a senior position in her company and held frequent meetings with her global team. It had become apparent to her and her boss, however, that her speaking style was undermining confidence in her leadership.

As a business coach specializing in Voice and Speech Improvement, I know this isn't gender-specific. Both women and men may have problems achieving vocal dynamism. My current client had a "small" voice: it was underpowered and too light for someone in authority. Indeed, when I first taped her leading a simulated business meeting, she exclaimed, "I sound like a little girl!"

When I first started working as a speech coach almost thirty years ago, a consultant called me who was having problems with potential clients. They would question his level of experience in initial phone calls. "How long have you been doing this?" they would ask, and "How old are you?" When he walked into my office, I found myself facing a man in his 50s with white hair.

So there's no doubt that your voice impacts perceptions of you. Below are three ways you can attain the voice of authority if it isn't carrying its own weight in your professional success.



1. Support Your Breath for Speaking Power

If your voice isn't giving the impression of power, it's not entirely your fault. We live in an age where we simply don't need to project our voices the way we once did. Few of us work outside anymore, where our voices needed to carry across distances.

It's all too easy now. Standing next to co-workers, holding a cell phone two inches from our mouths, or sitting two feet away from our web cams, we've turned into pale versions of the robust talkers we used to be. Yet our voices still need to convey our vitality as speakers.

The place to start is with supported breath that can effortlessly project the fullness of your sound. Learn how to breath diaphragmatically. It is breath that creates the vocal energy you need to reach every part of your performance space, and to sound like you mean business. You literally need energy to energize listeners, and to make essential words heard. Remember: the most important words in English usually come at the end of the phrase. Invest yourself with enough breath so you have the power to "punch" the idea or image embodied in those words.

2. Balance Your Sound to Achieve Authority

One reason my recent client (and many others I've coached) had a voice that sounded too young is that she spoke with too much "head voice." A key distinction you should know about is the dichotomy between **head voice** and **chest voice**. If used exclusively, the former can come across as thin and lightweight; and the latter like an old stuffed chair left in the basement.

Yet each of these voices has advantages and disadvantages. A strong head voice can sound young, bright, intelligent and lively (though its sound doesn't carry well and possesses no authority). The chest-voice speaker, on the other hand, has ample supplies of that last characteristic, though he or she seems to lack spontaneity and has a "fuddy-duddy" sound.

As you might imagine, you shouldn't speak entirely with either of these voices. You need a *balance* between head and chest voice. That's what I worked on with my recent client. The aim was to show her intelligence and flexibility, linked to experience and authority. And she needed a more forceful voice that commanded attention.

Tape yourself, and listen to whether you're at one end of the spectrum or the other. Then work toward a happy medium. Here are some specifics on how to develop a more powerful public speaking voice.

3. Color Your Voice for Maximum Expressiveness

Finally, when you have enough breath support to power and sustain your voice, and you're speaking with a mature and balanced sound, you can go for the gold. It's time to develop a vocal style that uses the full color palette of the emotions.

That's a metaphor I often use: colors. Too "pink" a voice, for instance, with work may begin to reveal more "burgundy" tones, reflecting maturity and fullness. Speaking in "grays" is possible, though that means there's an entire array of coloration not being used. A sad-sounding voice contains too many shades of "brown," and so on.

Audiences need to hear the emotions behind your convictions! When you speak you're leading, and you need to tap into the subtleties and nuances that reflect your intelligence. Then, of course, there's the sheer *power* of the voice that supports a call to action.

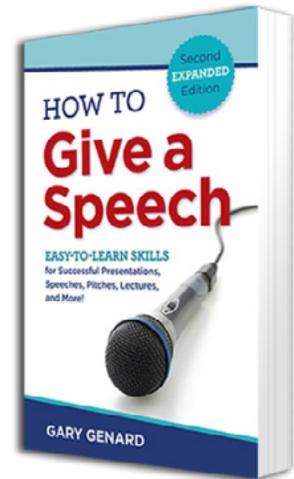
To get there, practice passages from fiction and poetry, which offer the greatest range of emotions to be expressed vocally. And listen to audio books read by voice actors, the performers par *excellence* in this field. The above techniques will help lend you the voice of authority. Learn to use them and feel comfortable with them, as you inspire and influence those who look to you as a leader.

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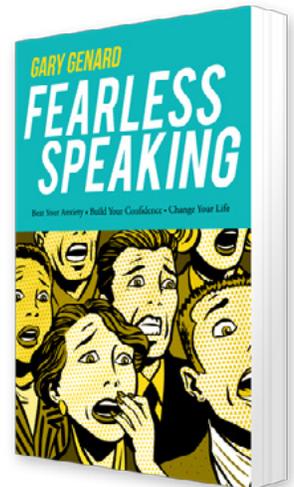


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Gary Genard, Ph.D., founder of [The Genard Method](#), is an expert in theater-based public speaking training. As an actor and speech coach, he uses performance techniques to help executives and leadership teams speak with confidence and influence. Dr. Genard consults and trains for corporations, governments, nonprofits, and individuals worldwide. Follow Gary on [Twitter](#).