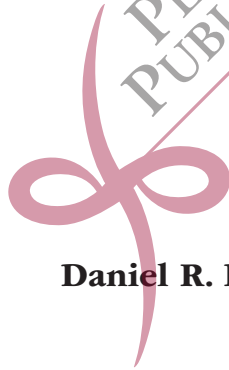


Is Your Voice Telling on You?

How to Find and Use Your Natural Voice

Third Edition



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Preface

Do you like your speaking voice? Does your voice serve you well (at home, at work, at play)? Does this book title, *Is Your Voice Telling on You?*, remind you that some of the time your speaking voice does not always represent the way you feel inside. The fact is, we don't always hear our selves as others do. And our voice is always changing in the various situations we find ourselves. Wherever we are or the situation we may be in, our voices should represent the real you.

When we first hear ourselves on some kind of voice playback, such as an answering machine, we ask the question, "Is that really me?" Hearing one's own voice on playback is often the first time we didn't like the way we sounded. Or we may over time be coming aware that our voices often "let us down." It may be only certain situations (like asking for a date, failing a job interview, or trouble making a sale) where our voices seemed to work against us.

Even when we realize that we have some kind of voice problem, most of us don't know what to do about it. *Is Your Voice Telling on You?* is a friendly way designed to help one find and use a better voice. With a little help, most of us can find and use a normal (or natural) voice, a voice that is distinctively our own, one that serves us well in the things that we do.

Over my long career as a speech pathologist, I have worked with people with voice problems in hospitals, university clinics, medical centers, and in private practice. I have worked as a vocal coach for athletes, actors, sales people, teachers, and politicians. I began to realize over time that most poor speaking voices were simply the result of people misusing their normal voice equipment: our lungs, vocal folds, and resonators. A good natural voice is a lasting voice produced with the right amount of effort, the right breathing, the appropriate pitch and loudness, with a balance of relaxation and tension.

Some kind of playback recorder (even a smartphone will do) will be essential as we listen and practice some of the voice exercises in the book. Former voice clients have told me they

always did better practicing alone, such as in a bedroom or their office—many have found their car was a great place to practice working on voice. In this book we'll talk about some natural enemies that work against developing a better voice, such as how our emotions (fear, anger, happiness, etc.) shape the way our voices sound. Some of our emotions we can express in our voices, and some of them are better controlled, if not hidden. The environment, such as low humidity and dryness, directly influences the quality of our voices. Some voices are compromised by the medications we take. Tobacco or marijuana smoke can produce devastating change to the vocal folds and must be avoided by anyone wanting to have a better voice.

The self-tests and exercises in the book are easy to use. The good part of working on your own voice this way is that you should feel and hear some improvement in your voice almost immediately. It will take some time, however, before changes in voice become more automatic to use. A good voice, like a good appearance or personality, does not come with a cosmetic “quick fix,” such as tucking in your stomach and standing taller, or showing a broad smile. For most of us, once the *natural* voice is found, it becomes an easier voice to use than the old voice we had before we found this book. Why? Because your *natural* voice is the *real* you.

—Daniel R. Boone, PhD
Tucson, Arizona

CHAPTER 1

Is Your Voice Telling on You?

“He looked like a leader—until he spoke.”

We all have known people who never get out of their cars without combing their hair or checking their makeup. They may spend a lot of money on clothes, hair styling, cosmetics, and fitness. They may have had a fine education, taken classes on the Web, and read all of the books on how to win friends and influence people. Yet all of their efforts can be undone because they have never given much thought to how their voices sound.

Carl was one of those people. At age 32, he had a great resume to submit for a management job with one of our country's largest pharmaceutical houses. His favorable email correspondence and even his references set Carl up for his first in-person interview. When he opened his mouth to answer a few questions by his two interviewers, out came a slightly hoarse breathy voice, not quite loud enough to be easily heard. He did not get the position that he had trained for and wanted. Subsequent feedback told him that the interviewers thought he sounded fearful and too tense to handle a management position.

Although Carl required professional help by a speech pathologist to correct the more obvious problems in his voice, the most common voice problems are caused by people doing things that prevent them from having a natural or normal voice. We hear people continually using a poor voice but they have no idea on how to correct it: people like Samantha, 24, who lost her

job as a TV weather forecaster because of viewer complaints of her high-pitched, nasal voice; or Jamie, 29, whose voice sounded so effeminate that other men in the locker room joked about him behind his back; or the woman who was mistaken on the telephone for her husband, or the husband whose voice sounded like he could be his wife or his mother. What we sound like is what people think we are.

Unfortunately, although many people realize their voices do not represent them well, either generally or in certain situations, they don't know how to improve the sound of their voices. This is where this book can help you develop a better voice by finding your real natural voice. The natural normal voice is produced by an easy, relaxed balance of breath support, vocal fold vibration, and appropriate voice resonance. Your natural voice appears to be the real you. Each of us has our own distinctive voices, which we can call our voice "fingerprint."

Your Voice "Fingerprint"

Just like a fingerprint, the human voice and speech pattern is amazingly distinctive. This is why a few words spoken on the smartphone by someone you know, or hearing a friend or family member talking, is all we need to identify who is speaking. Or we can quickly identify well-known celebrities or politicians by the sound of their speech and voice.

Our voice fingerprints are composed of a number of speech-voice behaviors that act separately or in combination. Here are the contributing parts of the voice "fingerprint":

The Number of Words You Say on One Breath. Some of us say few words on one breath. Some say many. The relative amount of pausing or phrasing that you use becomes unique to you.

How Fast You Speak. The normal conversational speaking rate is about 150 syllables per minute. If you speak at a different rate, this shapes the way you sound to others.

Your Rhythm of Speech. Both the number of words you say per breath and your speed of talking contribute to

your speech rhythm (or prosody). The melody and speech accents you use in talking, your voice inflections, are distinctively your own.

Your Ease in Breathing. Some of us struggle to have enough breath when we speak. Others never seem to run out of air. Such habitual breathing patterns contribute to your vocal identity.

The Pitch of Your Voice. Pitch varies from person to person, even among people of the same age and sex. How high or low your voice is pitched is a major factor in distinguishing your voice from other voices.

The Loudness of Your Voice. Loudness, of course, varies according to the situation in which you speak, but some people normally speak louder, or softer, than others. Your loudness level is also part of your vocal identity.

The Relative Relaxation or Tension of Your Voice. How relaxed or tense you are shows in your voice. The way we sound reflects not only any special circumstances we are in, but also our psychological state.

Your Mood State. Vocal individuality also is influenced by such things as whether we are happy or sad, eager, bored, worried, or optimistic.

The Clarity of Your Speech Articulation. Distinctness of speech, or articulation, varies widely from person to person. Some people have distinct accents or dialects. Some have small or large articulation problems, such as not being able to say the *r* sound correctly, or they may have a lisp. Differences of articulation are one of the most noticeable behaviors that distinguish our speech from that of others.

The Resonance of Your Voice. The sound of the voice is heavily influenced by vocal resonance. The position of your tongue, your mouth opening, and shutting off your mouth from your nose continually change as you speak, which adds to your individual sound.

All of these speech-voice behaviors blend together, and what comes out is distinctively you, your individual voice. That is why

you can say three words on the telephone and be recognized immediately.

But are you happy with that voice? Ask yourself these three critical questions:

1. Are you pleased with your own voice?
2. When you hear yourself on a recording or answering machine, do you like the way you sound?
3. Generally, do you think your voice makes a good impression on other people?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” then by following a few suggestions in this book and by developing your natural voice through practice, you can become happier with the way you sound and sound better to others.

The Listen to Voices Test

The first step for improving your voice is to develop an awareness of different voices and how they compare with your own. That is the purpose of The Listen to Voices Test.

This six-step test is designed to develop an awareness of different voice characteristics. The test begins with an alphabetical list of 100 adjectives, or descriptors, of different voices (Table 1–1). Each word denotes a positive (+) or negative (–) opinion of a voice. For example, *clear* denotes a normal voice free of any kind of defect and is a positive (+) descriptor. The word *scratchy* is a negative descriptor. Some of these terms you will already have heard used to describe voices. Many such words are seldom used by any of us. And others have their own private meanings for different people.

1. Review the list of 100 word-descriptors. Take time to think about the meaning of each word. Then look at each word and judge it as positive (+) or negative (–), and mark it in the space before each word. Mark even those you are not too sure about. Even if you have never really thought much about voices before, this exercise will help you develop a better awareness of voice characteristics.

Table 1-1. 100 Word-Descriptors for Voice

___ 1. Abrasive	___ 35. Golden	___ 68. Powerful
___ 2. Affected	___ 36. Good	___ 69. Quiet
___ 3. Aged	___ 37. Gravelly	___ 70. Quivering
___ 4. Angry	___ 38. Happy	___ 71. Relaxed
___ 5. Baby	___ 39. Harmonious	___ 72. Resigned
___ 6. Bad	___ 40. Harsh	___ 73. Resonant
___ 7. Beautiful	___ 41. Heavy	___ 74. Rich
___ 8. Breathy	___ 42. High	___ 75. Ringing
___ 9. Bright	___ 43. Hoarse	___ 76. Rough
___ 10. Brilliant	___ 44. Hollow	___ 77. Sad
___ 11. Bubbly	___ 45. Husky	___ 78. Scratchy
___ 12. Cello-like	___ 46. Immature	___ 79. Sexy
___ 13. Chesty	___ 47. Insecure	___ 80. Shallow
___ 14. Clangy	___ 48. Intimidating	___ 81. Sharp
___ 15. Clear	___ 49. Joyful	___ 82. Silken
___ 16. Coarse	___ 50. Light	___ 83. Smooth
___ 17. Confident	___ 51. Lovely	___ 84. Sophisticated
___ 18. Constricted	___ 52. Low	___ 85. Stentorian
___ 19. Cool	___ 53. Macho	___ 86. Strident
___ 20. Covered	___ 54. Masculine	___ 87. Sultry
___ 21. Cutting	___ 55. Mature	___ 88. Thin
___ 22. Dark	___ 56. Mellow	___ 89. Throaty
___ 23. Decisive	___ 57. Melodious	___ 90. Tight
___ 24. Deep	___ 58. Metallic	___ 91. Timid
___ 25. Dry	___ 59. Monotone	___ 92. Tired
___ 26. Dull	___ 60. Nasal	___ 93. Ugly
___ 27. Effeminate	___ 61. Nervous	___ 94. Unsure
___ 28. Edgy	___ 62. Normal	___ 95. Velvety
___ 29. Fearful	___ 63. Old	___ 96. Warm
___ 30. Flat	___ 64. Open	___ 97. Wavering
___ 31. Feminine	___ 65. Pinched	___ 98. Wet
___ 32. Fluttering	___ 66. Pleasing	___ 99. Whining
___ 33. Forced	___ 67. Poor	___ 100. Whiskey
___ 34. Friendly		
