VOICE AND LEADERSHIP
A New Paradigm for 21st Century Leaders


Voice is power—2500 years ago, the great Roman orator Cicero understood this. There was a Roman system of oratory that trained public speakers. It taught seeking out ideas or lines of argument; structure and organization; diction and style; physical delivery; and memory (speeches could last for hours and as they were spoken, not read, they had to be learned by heart.) From Moses to the Sermon on the Mount, from Mohammed to Gandhi, from Adolph Hitler to the fireside chats of Franklin Delano Roosevelt Voice has changed the world from the beginning of time.

By and large, however, today’s leaders—political, corporate and social except in rare instances, e.g. President Bill Clinton, Vaclav Havel, Elie Wiesel, Martin Luther King, and the Dalai Lama come to mind, have abdicated their true leadership responsibilities because they have lost the art of vocal empowerment.

For to truly be in mastery as a leader, one has to be in mastery in one’s communication skills. This requires meticulous preparation, scrupulous attention to detail and as in any other form that teaches mastery, it requires the conscious integration of mind/body/spirit. Every business leader, every political leader, great athlete, broadcaster, performer, artist that I train is seeking the same goal—to be the best of themselves possible—consciously— in the moment of performance/presentation whether it’s training a U.S. politician during the last election cycle who called one Sunday exhilarated and saying, “Arthur, I breathed.” Of course, he breathed but what he meant was he did it strategically—consciously. Or the global treasurer for one of the big three U.S. accounting firms who recently spent 15 to 20 hours via in-studio work, telephone, fax and/or email in preparation for a one-hour board presentation. Or most recently a speaking engagement at the Aspen Institute when after a mere hour and a half with a participant at the conference, he boldly stated to fellow attendees that he felt “his life had changed.”

With the advent of the invention of the telephone over a 100 years ago, we began to lose the art of letter writing. Now, since the computer age, we have begun to lose the art of communication. Typing is not chatting. It is typing. And I see every day wherever I teach in the world, more than ever, people’s inability to communicate confidently in
public. It is not a lost art, but rather a misplaced one. It is my professional and artistic goal to travel the globe showing one and all how to recapture their innate ability to be themselves whether speaking one-on-one or to millions. However, one of the challenges is that voice is the most intimate art form. We very often feel exposed—self-conscious rather than conscious of Self. Carl Jung even refers to the vocal area as the “ring of fear”. Sociologist misguidedly consider public speaking the greatest fear. As you’ll see in a moment, they’re mistaken.

The Latin root for the word intimate “intimus” means intrinsic or essential. It is intrinsic to be who we are and essential that we must. So if public speaking is not the greatest fear, what is? There are actually two fears—fear of abandonment and ownership of our power, and nowhere does this become more glaringly obvious than in the moment of public presentation. We hold our breath. Our body language tenses. Our eyes flutter. Our jaw tightens. We speak too fast. Pitch rises. We wonder what others might be thinking of us, etc. In these ways and others in perhaps a most critical situation, we exhibit inappropriate behaviors that interfere with the messenger and the successful communication of the message. Clearly stress-related evidence. The bottom line is we are not in charge. Circumstances and an understanding of what it truly takes to communicate our message and embody leadership at the highest levels are not understood and have not been taught.

One of the primary precepts of my work Vocal Awareness is the persona statement. The persona statement is fundamental for training leaders in the 21st century. The root of the word persona is Etruscan in origin. It is “phersu” which literally means “through the sound.” We clearly live in a society where perception is reality. There is also a known statistic that says in all verbal communication only 8% is language based; 38% is the sound of the voice and 54% is body language. Communicating via telephone theoretically 92% of the information is conveyed through the sound of the voice, not the content. The simple and insightful persona exercise helps one create a template for how they want to be perceived. I pose two questions for you to answer: (1.) How do you believe you are presently perceived? (There may be different answers depending on the circumstances.); and (2.) How would I like to be perceived? There is also an interesting metaphor that emerges through this exercise. One actually has a choice. When writing, especially the
second answer, don’t do it in cryptic bullet points, but rather in sentence form. For the punctuation at the end of the sentence will be a period and offers us another metaphor. We are actually saying, “this is how I want to be perceived—period.” There is no parenthetical caveat that says except when I’m nervous or am lazy and I don’t feel like it. “The period implies all the time.”

Another fundamental technique for embodying leadership is what I call visceral language—conveying the emotion of words. In this work, we strive “to make voice visual.” One learns “to see the pictures” of the story they are telling and to literally “see the punctuation.” Thoughts are underscored. Quotation marks employed and Vocal Awareness reminders are written throughout the text. In these and other ways, the speaker’s intrinsic voice begins to come through. Pitch and inflection change and a more natural cadence emerges to enable the speaker to deliver his message in a more conscious, committed and focused way. Through the persona statement and the above methods, one’s opportunity and responsibility becomes clear—to do what is necessary to embody the idealized Self in every communication.

A few years ago, I was speaking at the MBA school at the University of Texas followed a couple of weeks later with an engagement at GE’s corporate headquarters in New York. In Texas I said to the 400 graduate students, “When you move out into the business world, people are not going to say to you your voice is anxious or your voice is fragile, they’re going to say, you are anxious or you are fragile.” It is all metaphor. At GE by and large I didn’t see individuals reflecting the imprimatur of, at the time, the ninth largest economy in the world, I merely saw businessman and businesswomen. What I’m saying here is that we need to become much more astute in embodying our persona, our leadership brand.

The days of merely being business leaders or political leaders in an unconscious and habituated way are over. The stakes are too high. In these days of instant communication, mastery is mandatory. It is now time to require a new paradigm. Stating two axioms from my work: “In the essence of every discussion I will consciously convey authority, vision, wisdom and attention to detail. In every communication I will consciously convey and maximize the full potential of my persona.” It is our responsibility
to our companies, our nation and our world to convey our message in the most empowered way. To achieve mastery requires integration and integrity. Integration and integrity have the same root source. They mean “wholeness.” When we are whole and own our Voice, we own our Power.

Lastly, I will share an acrostic on leadership I created some time ago.

Leading by example
Empowered/Empowering/Ennobling/Embodying
Anchor/Accountability Dynamic
Excellence
Responsible/Respectful/Reasoned/Reflective
Strength/Steadfast/Safe/Secure/Strategic Honorable/Honor
Inspiring/Integrity/Intelligence
Patient/Practiced/Passionate/Purposeful

The leadership acrostic is not a stratagem simply for leaders in an antiquated paradigm, but rather for leaders committed at the deepest and highest levels to profoundly conveying the message while embodying the messenger. Connecting historically, philosophically and strategically with the legacy of oratorical masters of previous generations—building a bridge from the past to the present—recommiting to what it truly takes to be an inspired communicator is the inherent responsibility of the 21st Century leader.
About the author:

Arthur Samuel Joseph, M.A., founder and chairman of the Vocal Awareness® Institute, has studied the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of the human voice for more than four decades. He is a master teacher/strategist to Hollywood celebrities such as Anne Bancroft, Pierce Brosnan, Sean Connery and Angelina Jolie, and corporate giants Deloitte & Touche, Disney, Ernst & Young, Ritz-Carlton Hotels, Toyota, Universal Studios Hollywood Company and many more. In addition, he trains notable sports figures such as football luminaries Marshall Faulk and Emmitt Smith, basketball star Magic Johnson, several Olympic Gold medalists, Indianapolis 500 champions and others. He was vocal director on the film, Annie, as well as singing consultant to numerous musicals on Broadway and London's West End.

Mr. Joseph has lent his expertise in the political arena on both the state and national levels. He has been a professor at the University of Southern California, a visiting artist at Yale and George Washington Universities, and has taught at the Graduate Extension Program at New York University. His books, online courses, audio programs and other content can be accessed at the Vocal Awareness® website, www.vocalawareness.com.