

It's not what you say - it's the way that you say it!

SUCCESS may hinge on not what you say but how you say it, claims a speech expert. Frustrated professionals who dress the part, work extra hours but still fail to get ahead are not making the right sounds. Mumbler and those with a high pitched squeak are mostly passed over by employers, research has found. Having a clear voice and sounding enthusiastic can be a ticket to success.

Voice coach Meribeth Bunch found most of her clients with careers at a standstill succeeded after changing the way they spoke. It was not a case of regional accents, but of speaking clearly and with enthusiasm. In order to change the way a voice sounds it was necessary to improve posture and stop grimacing, frowning or even smiling too much.

Mrs Bunch, author of "Creating Confidence", advises ambitious people to listen to a tape-recording of themselves or, better still, watch themselves on video. The way a voice sounds accounts for 38 per cent of the effectiveness of communication, according to an American study. Physical appearance and body language make up 55 per cent, while a mere seven per cent relates to the actual words spoken.

Mrs Bunch, who counts leading actors and singers among her clients, said: *"People tend to forget the powerful effect their voice has on people in terms of portraying who they are. It is sad, but many who get turned down for jobs may be their own worst enemy by not thinking about how they sound. It is not a case of trying to sound upper-class to impress, but of reflecting warmth, sounding keen and speaking in a tone which is pleasing to the ear."*

Regarding the voice as a musical instrument was the first step towards getting rid of 'grating timbres' or a 'dull monotone', which could spell disaster in an interview. *"A voice which is artificially high will put people off, whereas someone speaking with a clenched jaw may sound aggressive,"* explained Mrs Bunch. *"Someone mumbling will come across as incoherent and we all know how boring it can sound when someone speaks in a monotone."*

Those praised by Mrs Bunch include Tony Blair, who added gravitas to his voice after becoming Prime Minister and sounded 'more statesmanlike'. Tory leader William Hague she saw as giving off mixed messages. *"I hear someone who wants to do well, but his voice is saying: 'I'm not sure I know how.' which doesn't inspire confidence."*

Although Baroness Thatcher is hardly regarded as an underachiever, Mrs Bunch maintains that the Iron Lady's voice always let her down. *"She started out with a high-pitched squeak and even with all the training she had her voice still lacked a certain warmth and enthusiasm."* Prince Charles apparently does a good job of 'sounding royal', but this gives little away about his real character.