
How to Present Like a Superwoman



By Steve Knight , INSEAD Adjunct Professor of Business Communication

Tips to help women present and communicate with power and embody who they truly are.

I write this article from the heart with one intention; to help women in business present and communicate with power and embody who they truly are.

It is sweet music to my ears when a female client says after coaching, “Wow, I can celebrate who I am and I can learn how to be more of me, so that I can be a better me.”

I feel very proud and honoured when a female client starts out dreading presenting and ends up being told by their colleagues that their presentation was the best one of the conference.

Voice is Power

In this article I am going to focus purely on voice. I will follow up with body language and other areas in later posts.

I coach women in leadership positions from all parts of the world and the common hurdles they report to me are voice projection and pitch. Based on the conversations I have had and continue to have, many women around the globe say they have been conditioned from an early age to speak quieter (or softer) than men, or they have simply slipped into that way of being without even realising it. Or there is often a feeling of “I am less than others” and that will certainly shackle the possibilities.

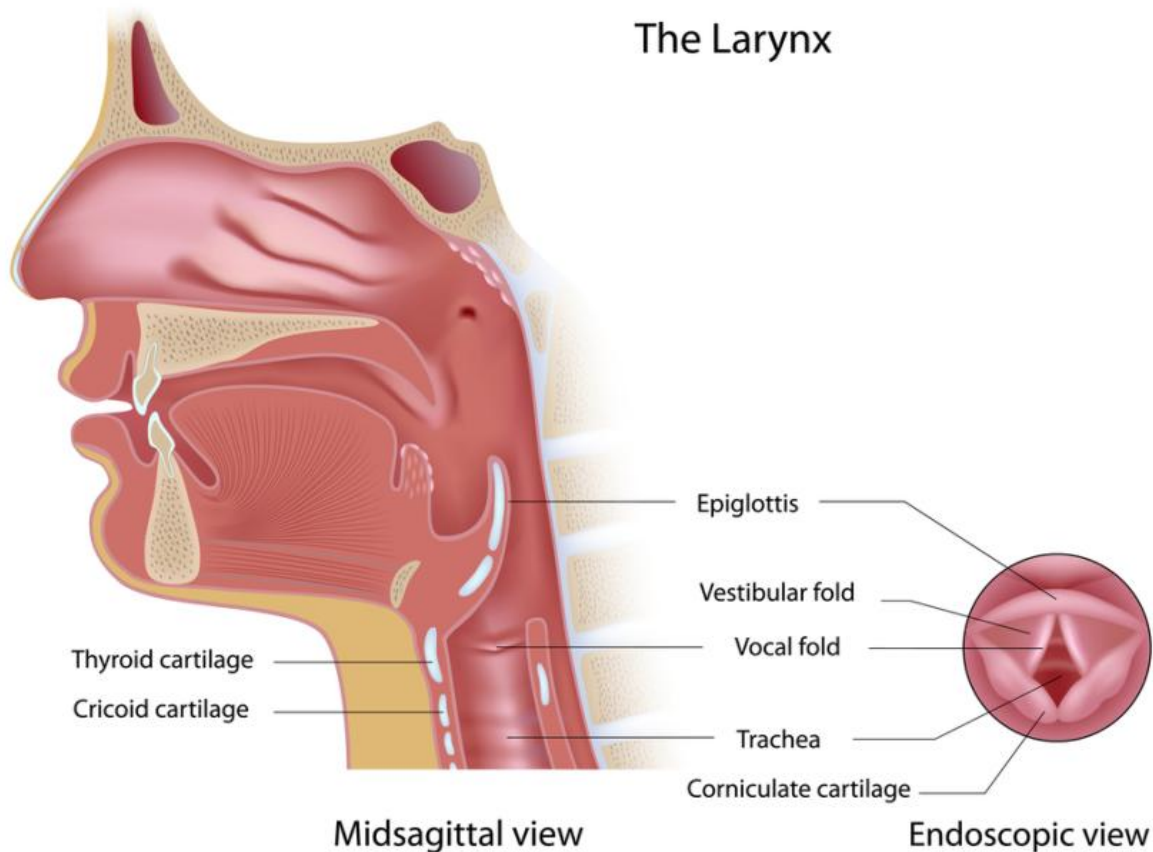
Many women also report that, despite being a mother of three children and holding a management or leadership role, when they answer those invasive marketing phone calls in the early evening at home, the caller asks if their mum or dad are home; because they have a high-pitched voice.

Voice Projection

Projection is different than volume. Increasing volume would be to speak normally into a microphone in a lecture theatre for example and raise the volume on the mixer desk. This does not give you voice projection, it simply raises the volume and evenly distributes your voice around the room.

Voice projection starts with diaphragmatic breathing (rather than chest breathing) so that you maximise your lung capacity, which provides a more powerful exhalation (watch the animation below). The energy from your exhalation then vibrates your vocal cords (also known as vocal folds; see 2nd image below) with greater efficiency (compared to chest breathing) and enables you to speak with more power from your core. This is not about shouting; this is purely about harnessing your natural energy to maximise your voice projection.

The Larynx



Great voice projection means that it doesn't matter whether you are standing close to people, sitting across a large desk, or standing at the front of a lecture theatre with all the participants standing behind the very back row of seats, they will hear you at more or less the same level, regardless of the distance (within reason of course). It's an extraordinary experience when you achieve that level of uniformity for the first time.

So get in a room and practice projecting your voice with some colleagues or friends. Imagine that when your voice leaves your mouth it is soaring upwards like a squash ball leaving the racket and landing with accuracy and precision at the far end of the court.



Allow your voice to soar with power, purpose and direction to land at the ears of your audience. Feel and hear the natural energy you can create with your breath and your vocal cords. Get your colleagues to raise their hands if they need you to increase your voice projection and do what they are asking.

When quieter speakers experience their true voice for the first time in this way, they will most likely say to their colleagues, that's crazy, it sounds like I am shouting now; but their colleagues will reply, no you're not, now you're perfect and we can hear you really clearly. It sounds to the person speaking like they are shouting because as a habitual quiet speaker they won't be used to the sound of their voice at that level of projection coming back into their ears. The change is amazing and highly impactful.

Then you need to maintain it by practicing by yourself every day. Record your voice on your smartphone or other device. Listen back and hear the before or after effect.

Vocal Pitch

You may have been told that your voice is high pitched or you may know that it is. Or you may be interested in experiencing the impact that speaking

with a lower pitched voice has on you and on others.

When a woman speaks with a combination of low (quiet) voice projection and a higher pitch it can really lessen their level of impact and influence. Many women report to me that when they put forward an idea at a meeting it seems to pass unnoticed, but when someone else around the table in the same meeting proposes the very same idea moments later it gets picked up and endorsed.

The key here is to experiment with your vocal range. Many women speak from a place of habit and are not aware of the range they have. Find your sweet spot and play around as if your voice is a musical instrument, which it is in essence, one that works on energy and vibration through your breath and your vocal cords. Take a chorus or a line or two from one of your favourite songs. Again, use your smartphone to record yourself. Sing the words out at a pitch you are comfortable with. Then if you are aiming to lower your pitch simply sing the words out again at a slightly lower key and see how it feels and sounds. Then try a little lower and so on. When you get lower than your natural field your voice will start to crack, so that's the sign to go back up one notch. From the key that you are comfortable and happy with immediately switch from singing the words to speaking the words. Play back the recording and hear the before and after effect.



From this “new” lower key for you, start making it your goal to speak with conscious awareness around this pitch/range so you speak with purpose rather than out of habit on autopilot. The same goes for your voice projection.

I would like to share the following short video that amazingly demonstrates the voice and presence transition of the late, former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. The video starts in her early years and ends in her latter years. Politics aside, this was some transition.

Of course you can get voice coaching and that’s what I help women in leadership roles with, but in the meantime the above steps will give you a great self-help boost.

The key here is to find your own personal transition. How do you want to be perceived. Set your sights on the changes you want to make and go for it. It’s not about you becoming a woman you are not; it’s about you becoming the woman that you are truly capable of being.

Over to you. It’s like going to the gym or working on any of your goals... it takes discipline and effort and where your voice is concerned the results will certainly speak for themselves.

www.yourvoiceispower.nl

Please let us know how you get on and of course do add your comments and thoughts here.

Main photo: Shutterstock: Zoom Team

Breathing animation: youbeauty.com

Image of Vocal Cords: Shutterstock: Alila Medical Media

Photo Squash: Shutterstock: Kzenon

Photo Singer: Shutterstock: Studio10Artur

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Power.

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