

Coaching Corner

Speak better to sing better



Jim Emery

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The average person speaks between 2-3 hours per day. That's 15-20 hours of speaking per week. People who depend on their voice for their livelihood, like salesmen and teachers, may actually double that usage. And the habits we practice every day while speaking also impact our singing.

You can change your habits

Rather than letting our speaking habits adversely affect our singing habits, why not reverse the relationship so that our singing habits positively affect our speaking habits? Then we can have the same good vocal habits all the time.

Record yourself

Before changing any speaking habits, record yourself while speaking. Do it in such a way that your normal speaking habits show through. If you have a smart phone, there are



free voice activated recording apps available for both iPhone and Android. After you record several conversations,

listen and see how you sound. You may be surprised that your wonderful singing voice isn't used nearly enough while you're talking. Do you wonder why?

Posture

We all know that good posture enables good breathing and good breathing enables good singing. Well, the same thing is true for speaking. Do you slouch when you talk? If you sit up straight or stand tall, it's much easier to breathe correctly when you're talking.



Breathing

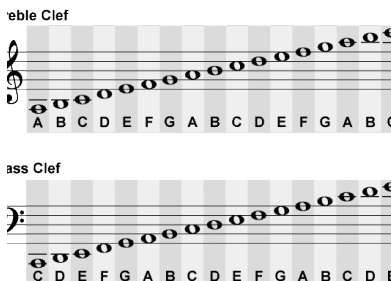
Deep diaphragmatic breathing is superior to shallow chest breathing just as much when you're talking as when you're singing. Practice good breathing technique when you're speaking and see how much easier it is on your voice. Surprisingly, the most important breathing technique may be just remembering to breathe. Many of us tend to speak in paragraphs instead of phrases. Try interspersing breaths at phrase endings rather than sentence or paragraph endings.

Pitch

Most American males speak too low. While we were growing up, we were sub-consciously (and mistakenly) taught that a deep voice is more authoritative. Consequently many of us stress our voice by speaking at the lower limit of our comfort range, producing low-grade fatigue day in and day out. This is bad for our speaking voices and consequently for our singing voices.

Find your range

There are several good ways to find your optimum speaking range. One that I especially like is to listen to a friend talk and give him regular “mm-hmm” (active



listening) feedback. Unless you intentionally force this out of range, the pitch of the “mm” is a good lower limit for everyday speaking and the “hmm” is a good upper limit. Find these notes on your piano or pitch pipe. Then practice speaking within this range on a regular basis.

Finally, don’t speak in a monotone. Every good

speech instructor will tell you that. It bores your listeners. But it also stresses the voice in the same way that tensing any body muscle all the time does. Varying the pitch of your speaking within your optimum speaking range helps keep your voice relaxed and effective.

Diction

Do you mumble? Do people often have difficulty understanding you? Your regional dialect or just your personal speaking habits may make your words difficult to understand. These speaking habits may reduce the effectiveness of your singing diction, too. Practice speaking with clear full word sounds. Maintain a smooth legato speech pattern with clear articulation, open vowels and clear consonants. Your listeners will appreciate it, and your singing diction habits will also improve.

Registers

Most of us speak in chest voice most of the time. This is the strong voice Santa uses in his “ho ho ho” laugh. While chest voice is useful in singing, it often needs to be tempered with head voice or even falsetto. Head voice is the gentler baby talk voice we use with toddlers. Unless your job demands the strong



voice all the time, experiment speaking with more of the gentler head voice. You may find your listeners (and your kids) less intimidated by you. It will also build good head voice habits for your singing.

Vocal health

There are also any number of good vocal health habits that apply to speaking and singing. Maintaining good hydration by drinking plenty of water throughout the day, avoiding dehydrators like caffeine, alcohol, and antihistamines as much as possible, not smoking, avoiding excessive throat clearing, shouting, or whispering, and avoiding extended talking over vehicle or crowd noise all will have positive impact on your speaking and singing voice.

Summary

Be conscious of how your speaking habits can affect your singing habits. Regularly use good posture, breathing, pitch, diction, and registers while speaking. You’ll find those habits will carry over to help make you a better singer.