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Rich Van Slyke is one of our favorite voice guys. Here is an excellent piece he wrote for *Friday Morning Quarter Back* on how to protect that special instrument, the voice.

Warming up, using the natural sound and listening back to yourself are tactics that are too often ignored by air talent.

## Top 10 Things To Know If You Use Your Voice On The Job

By Rich Van Slyke

You talk on the radio every day. Like a guitar player with a Gibson Les Paul, your voice is your instrument. The better your instrument sounds, the more you like playing, the better you play, the more fun you have. And the more people like you. The sound of your voice matters. Scientists have conducted studies by playing the sound of two voices saying the exact same words. Then, they ask the subjects, “Which person is more likable?” “Which person would you like to invite to your home?” People often decide about your likeability based on the sound of your voice.

A couple years ago, I decided to learn to sing. So I got some How To Sing DVDs and watched a bunch of YouTube videos. And I have learned a lot about the human voice. I’ve worked with top voice coaches like David Lyerly and Marice Tobias. It is remarkable how many years I’ve been using my voice on the job, without really understanding the best way to use it.

What is one of the biggest misconceptions for vocal performers? You are born with the sound of your voice and there’s no way to improve it. Wrong. You CAN make your voice sound better. Without performance enhancing drugs. Here are the top 10 things you should know.

1. **Vocal Warm Up** – Your vocal chords and your facial muscles are the like an NFL player’s arms and legs. A pro athlete would never think of hitting the field without warming up. Neither should you. When you warm up properly, which only takes a few minutes, you start off sounding strong and confident.

And when I say warm up, I mean to actually raise the temperature of your voice production muscles, through increased blood flow to your vocal cords and your mouth and face. To do this, simply hum and make the blowing bubbles sound. Start at a very low rumble and slowly raise the pitch of your voice, then come back down. Or just read something out loud. Another easy way to warm up is to do vocal warm up exercises,

even if you can't sing. Just go to YouTube and search "vocal warm up exercises" and you will find a short video that works for you. There's nothing better than turning on the mic, knowing your voice is warmed up and sounding great!

2. **Body Posture** – Your vocal instrument sounds best when your back is straight and your head is level, not tilted up or down. Imagine pressing your back and head against the wall, looking straight ahead. That's the position you want. With your back straight. When you slump, it makes it harder to proper breathing and resonance in your head.
3. **Vocal Range** - Know your range. Everybody has a range where their voice sounds good. Most radio people think they should be as deep as possible. But it may not be as deep as you think. Record yourself saying the same line 4 times in different ranges. Some low, some high. Pay special attention to the range where you feel no tension in your throat. Now, play those 4 lines for people and ask them which sounds the best. You will be surprised!
4. **What Are You Thinking?** – If there is something negative on your mind, it will affect the way you sound. Are you upset there is too much copy? Instead of thinking positive about the message, you are thinking negative about too much copy, which will put the sound of irritation and anger in your voice. We can hear the frustration, but we don't know why. Yes, there is too much copy, but you still want to sound good. To solve this, take a moment to voice your concern out loud or write it down. Say, "There is too much copy!" (take a big breath) Ok, you got it off your chest, now focus on the message.
5. **Understand The Mechanism** - Imagine your wind pipe as a column of air that you push across your vocal cords. Your job is to push the air over your vocal cords and let them vibrate to create the sound. Then you let head and mouth shape the sound. Like an upside down saxophone. The power comes from your diaphragm pushing air, not from your throat. Imagine calling across the street to someone about to get hit by a car. Try this right now. Call out "hey!" as if you were warning someone across the street about to get hit by a car. You see that your back is straight and you are squeezing your stomach muscles? This produces a clear natural voice. It's the most pleasant for sound.
6. **Smoke and Drink!** Lots of beer and lots of cigarettes. Just kidding. But you should drink lots of water. Dry throat is the enemy. You want your throat to be moist all day long. Makes you sound better and lowers the risk of damage.
7. **Be Yourself** - Don't try to sound like somebody else. Especially if it means straining. Hear a voice you really like? Wanna sound just like him or her? I know what you are thinking, "Why shouldn't I try to sound like them? They

sound great.” The reason is that the human ear is very perceptive. We can tell if you are being natural, or if you are putting on a voice. We may not be able to put our finger on it, but we know something is a little off. And unless you are a character in a movie or a cartoon, we prefer the sound of your natural voice to the sound of you trying to be some body else.

8. **Eliminate Tension** – This is one of the hardest things to master. Because we like to feel like we are giving a big effort. And straining feels good. You want to give it a big effort. To feel like you are working hard. But if the muscles in your throat feel tight, you are straining and this impacts the sound of your voice. The human voice sounds best when there is no tension. (Shane Media has a couple of exercises for this, so just ask.)
9. **Confidence** – Everybody loves the sound of someone who talks with confidence. Once you have confidence faked, the rest is easy! You can sound confident even if you don't feel confident. Just ask yourself, do I sound confident? And if I were speaking with a ton of confidence, what would I sound like. How would I talk? Record, then listen to playback and ask yourself again, does this sound like a person who is confident. *Don't focus on your voice, focus on your emotion.* Think Clint Eastwood, who oozes confidence. Sometimes a whisper is louder than a shout.
10. **Record Yourself** – This is really the only way to hear your voice as other people hear you. Notice what you like about your sound. When you get a good sound, save it. Maybe have 4 or 5 different sounds saved. This is what I sound like when I am excited, but not too hyped up. This is what I sound like when I am very relaxed. And confident. Then, you can go back and be reminded of what you like. It's amazing how fast we can pick up the good sound of our own voice. You can hear a sample and in 3 or 4 seconds, know exactly how to get the same great sound!

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