

## Body Language 32

### Using Volume

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



Volume is a type of body language that we often overlook, but it can be really important. Actually, our natural instincts take us in the wrong direction, so it is important to grasp and internalize this information.

It is human nature that when a person is upset or otherwise agitated, the volume goes up. In the extreme, a person may be literally shouting at another person. The irony is that if you really want to be heard, it is better to have a very low

volume than a blustery overtone.

Professional speakers know that when they have something really important to share, they get maximum attention when they lower rather than raise the volume. Of course, the level of volume needs to be mindful of those who have difficulty hearing.

Speakers who bellow on and on lose the attention of the audience because it seems like every word is critical. I recall one speaker I heard once who put maximum energy into every word or phrase. He was actually a very boring speaker, and I checked out mentally about halfway through his talk.

To be a successful speaker requires compelling content with delivery appropriate to the audience and the ability to shift to meet their needs. Great speakers constantly read the body language of participants in order to determine if they are fully engaged in the content.

The best pattern of volume is to have a variety not only in intensity but in cadence. Slow down your pace, lower the volume and people will pay the most attention. However, be aware that overuse of this technique can be as annoying as just shouting all the time.

These tips for public speaking also work remarkably well when interfacing with an individual. If you and the other person are shouting at each other and talking over the other person's points, there is actually very little communication going on. It is easy to break the tension and get your points heard by going low and slow.

The same thing happens when parents rant at their children in a loud voice explaining why it is important to not run with scissors. The problem is that the kid is internalizing only what a tyrant the parent is. There is not much teaching going on. By toning the volume down to a loving and gentle tone, the child will be much more alert to the message and may even follow the rule next time.

You can try this technique in any setting and make much more progress than pushing back against the other person.

The next time a cop pulls you over for speeding, rather than give the officer a piece of your mind about how late you are and how other cars were whizzing by you, try a soft and humble approach. You just might find it's more effective.

A similar technique worked for me last summer when I was pulled over for doing 46 mph in a 30 mph zone. It was just as I was entering a small town, and the officer was parked just beyond a little rise blocking the view so there was no time to slow down once I saw him. By engaging the officer in conversation that my destination was a nearby camp that I attended when I was a boy and that I was not familiar with the speed patterns in his town and must have missed the sign, he let me off with a warning. He might have attended that famous camp as well when he was a boy. By lowering my volume, the officer listened to my request.

It is human nature to raise our voice when we are upset. Since we communicate with people constantly: in a family setting, at work, or even when making a presentation, the success of getting our message across is a function of many factors, including our volume. If we think about the alternative to raising our voice, life can be a lot more pleasant for us and for others around us as well.

*This is a part in a series of articles on "Body Language." The entire series can be viewed on <https://www.leadergrow.com/articles/categories/35-body-language> or on this blog.*

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