

# Speak Up!

By Judith Filek—President  
Impact Communications, Inc.

Soft voices are the bane of many people. As a soft talker, you may think it is not such a big issue. However, for your listeners, a voice that is not clearly heard is maddening. It causes people to interrupt or to tune out, especially if they are on a long conference call. One of my clients said, “When I can’t hear a speaker, I ask the person to speak up one time. If nothing changes, I begin to respond to email. I am not going to aggravate myself.”

Most people with soft voices feel it is just something they are born with, and there is nothing they can do about it. In fact, to them, their voice sounds plenty loud enough since it is bouncing off the gray matter in the skull. There are some solutions.

Typically, a soft voice is a badly produced voice. Breathing is often shallow and irregular. The person pauses for air, only when they run out. The solution is to breathe from the diaphragm. Practice taking in a breath while counting to five, holding that breath for a count of three and slowly exhaling for a count of five. Repeat five times.

Lie flat on the floor or speak in front of a mirror while your hands are above your head. The only way you can breathe from these positions is from the diaphragm. Now try raising the volume of your voice. Speak on your exhaled breath. Imagine that you are talking to people who are hard of hearing. Undoubtedly, you will have all the air you need to produce a louder voice.

Until you master diaphragmatic breathing, speak in short sentences. Often a person whose voice gets softer and softer speaks in very long sentences or they connect one sentence to another with “and, but or so.” Let each sentence come to a definite end. Then, pause and refuel.

Picture your voice on a continuum from 1–10. Most soft talkers speak with the volume maximizing at 3–4. If you are speaking from a speaker on the table in a meeting situation, your volume needs to be raised to an 8–9, particularly if there are others sitting around the table or remote listeners.

To monitor the volume of your voice, tape your voice regularly. Most cell phones have the capacity to record. Set your phone on your desk and stand up. Review and see if you can comfortably hear it. Next, move the phone further and further away and continue to raise your voice.

Use a headset when possible and move the mouth piece closer to your lips. Announce to others that you are working on increasing volume. Give people on the phone permission to interrupt if they are not hearing you well. After any phone conversation, ask for feedback on your volume from someone who will be honest.

Soft talkers aren’t born that way. Depending on the environment where you were raised, loud voices might not have been tolerated. You may have learned to dial down your voice over time. However, it is important to remember in a business environment, a stronger voice is taken more seriously. Make sure no one has to say, “I can’t hear you.” Learn to **“Speak up!”**

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