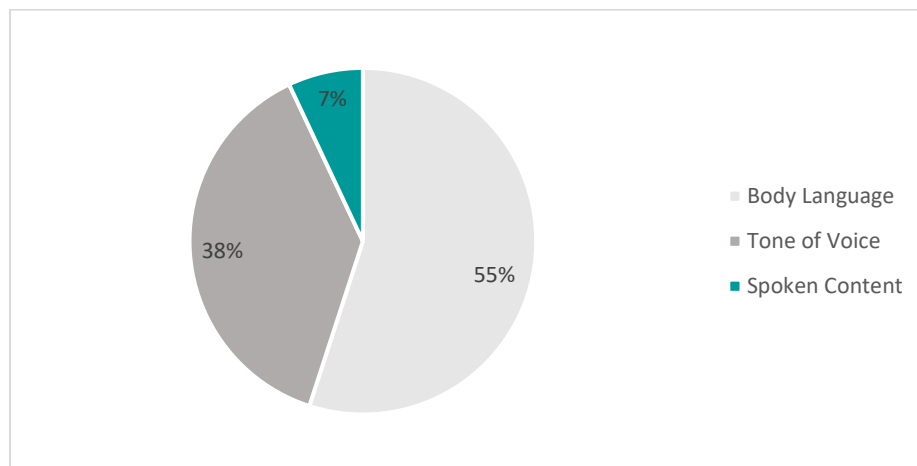


The Power of Your Voice

By Kelly Smith, Editorial Nancy Trypuc

Non-verbal communication is a powerful tool in the interview process and the primary driver for how people, in all situations, begin to relate to us and make decisions on our abilities and likabilities.

In 1971, Albert Mehrabian, a psychology professor at the University of California, published a book *Silent Messages*, where he stated 93% of all communication does not happen through spoken word. Instead it occurs through body language and tone of voice.



As the interview process evolves due to external forces and internal company policies, hiring and talent acquisition leaders lean toward initial contact with a candidate to be a phone screen rather than a video call.

Hiring leaders do this for two reasons:

- Technology and bandwidth concerns for the interviewee
- Strides to minimize bias in the interview decisioning process so a diverse docket can be identified enforcing company policy

What does this mean for the interviewee? The value of body language is lost.

The only information hiring managers can focus on is what you say and how you say it; content and tone ... with tone being 5x more important than content.

So how can you as the interviewee be memorable in your phone screen and maximize the use of your tone?

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The Basics of Tone

There are multiple components to your tone, and the components interact with each other to deliver the message as intended.

Example

Your doctor comes in to deliver your test results, and in a high pitch with a rising intonation at the end he slowly states, 'From what I can see, it seems you're going to be ok.'

Do you believe him? You better seek a second opinion in our view. The high pitch in a situation where he should be serious clearly indicates he's nervous, and the crescendo at the end doesn't exude confidence and conviction in the message he is delivering.

Think of how an interviewer would feel if they heard an answer to a question in this tone. They're not going to believe you know what you're talking about.

Exercise

A good technique is to answer most questions like you would recite your phone number.

1-2-3/ 4-5-6 /7-8-9-9

Now, say your phone number out loud.

Most likely you've started confident because you know your own phone number, with strong volume because you need the person to hear your number, and a falling intonation because you're serious because it is your phone number, and you say each number clearly and articulately because you want the person to call you.

Key Components of Tone: Pitch, Pace, Volume

- **Pitch** – The definition of pitch is the relative highness or lowness of a tone as perceived by the ear. Intonation is how your pitch varies, either going up or down. There are four types of intonation: Falling, rising, non-final, wavering. For our purposes, we'll discuss falling and rising intonations.

Falling Intonation

A falling intonation is meant to be used when the speaker is trying to relay serious or important information or they are attempting to capture information. When used differently, it confuses the listener.

Examples

- I'll be back later this afternoon.
- What's your name?

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Repeat those out-loud and note the feeling it delivers. Now, in our earlier example if the doctor had used a falling intonation, we may have believed him a bit more and not started to run for the door.

Exercise - Example in an interview

After we launched the new technology, we saw a 25% reduction in operating expenses.

Repeat out-loud, record yourself if necessary. How do you sound?

Rising Intonation

A rising intonation is meant to be used when the speaker is trying to indicate high-energy feelings like excitement or anger, or they are asking yes or no questions.

Examples

- I can't believe that happened!
- Did you have fun at the park?

When you add a rising intonation to a serious statement, it indicates to the listener you are not confident in what you are saying.

Think of the above interview example in the new technology launch, and how that answer would be perceived by an interviewer if you had a rising intonation. They wouldn't think you believed your own answer.

So, remember, watch your pitch and keep practicing by saying your phone number.

- **Pace** – Pace is your speech rate; how quickly or slowly you deliver a message.

Fast pace

A fast pace delivers a message of excitement, urgency and potentially aggressiveness depending on how and when it's used. In general, there aren't many reasons to have a fast pace when responding to an interview question unless the conversation is on a personal topic or in a quick wrap-up statement. The interviewer will just think you are nervous.

Example

- Yes, I was so excited when I moved to Charlotte, NC. It offered so many incredible opportunities!
- So, overall, yes, the project went so much better than expected.

Slower pace

A slower pace tends to indicate importance in the message, and helps the audience grasp the concept of your message more easily. If used at the wrong time, it can also make the interviewee seem non-assertive. When interviewing, anytime you answer a question it should have a relatively slow pace. It's a good idea to sprinkle in some fast pace wrap-up statements though, or the interviewer may get bored.

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Exercise – Say the two sentences out loud

Slow The marketing campaign I worked on delivered a 300% return because of just one small adjustment to the criteria change in the test cell.

Fast Everyone was so thrilled with the outcome!

- **Volume** – how loud or soft your voice is. When it comes to voice volume during the interview process, the key is to vary it.
 - A consistently loud voice can sound bullying and overbearing and may be off-putting to colleagues, resulting with colleagues unwilling to engage with the individual.
 - A consistently soft voice can lead the interviewer to believe the candidate is meek and may not have the qualifications to push through barriers in a project. It can also be perceived as lacking confidence in the answer to the interview question.

Example

Think of how you could vary your volume in this example of an answer to an interview question:

'My biggest disappointment was in this new product launch. We encountered unexpected delays with one of our suppliers and delayed the launch by three months. I learned to diversify and I added a back-up supplier that could fill future gaps, if they occur.'

If you say most of the statement loudly, the interviewer will not hear the concern in your voice, they'll just hear aggression.

If you say most of the statement quietly, the answer will be delivered with a tone of sadness and the interviewer will be unsure if they should believe the situation was truly fixed.

Now think of the statements being delivered in the below manner, bold meaning louder.

*'My **biggest** disappointment was in this **new** product launch. We encountered **unexpected** delays with one of our suppliers and **delayed** the launch by **three** months. I **learned to diversify** and I **added** a back-up supplier that could fill future gaps, if they occur.'*

While there are many components involved in a person's tone, we believe the most relevant when phone interviewing are **pitch**, **pace** and **volume**. Answering an interview question with a tone style that doesn't fit the answer will immediately create red flags for the interviewer.

Remember, everything you need to know about tone is in your phone number.
Keep practicing.