

Developing Voice and Presence

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April 30, 2020



What does your voice say about you?

Many of us put time, effort, energy, and expense into every aspect of our presence:

- Our dress
- Our stance
- Our messaging.

But all of that can be sabotaged in an instant when you say your first word, if your first word isn't delivered with the strength of a confident voice.

Just Listen

Here's an exercise. For the rest of the day, every time someone speaks, close your eyes briefly and ask yourself: what does this person's voice say about them?

A thin, high voice can be perceived as weak and ineffectual.

A low, slow voice can be perceived as thoughtful.

A booming voice can be perceived as either commanding or overbearing.

What does your voice say about you?

In our last Journey to a Board Seat article, we discussed Personal Brand – the packaging of “you” to share with the world using the four pieces of your Executive Board Package. But many people actually *won't* get to know you through those documents.

They'll get to know you when they meet you and hear you present *yourself*.

Meet Your Voice Coach

At the Athena Alliance, the journey to a board seat includes a stop with Voice and Presence Coach, Hillary Wicht. Working with Hillary can make you feel like a movie star or a celebrity politician ~ she refines the Elevator Pitches of leaders and helps them speak with authority. Once you've mastered the art of delivering your Elevator Pitch with confidence and clarity, including with a strong voice and presence, you will engender confidence in others every time they meet you.

And Your Voice Coach May Be You

As with all of the coaches on the Athena Alliance journey, Hillary has endless resources for leaders wanting to improve their voice and presence.

Just listen to the impact this experience had on Athena Member and CFO of SurveyMonkey, Debbie Clifford:

“I give 95% of the credit for securing a board seat to Athena. Athena is an organization that has changed my life for the better. Athena helped me find my voice. I started speaking softly and without conviction. Through the aid of Athena, I learned how to be more confident in telling my story. I found a louder, more compelling voice.”

Debbie Clifford
CFO of SurveyMonkey

But what if on your path you're just exploring? You don't have to be an Athena member to find your voice.

- If you're not yet ready for a voice coach, you can easily work on your voice on your own.
- Try recording your voice on your smartphone and listening to yourself speak. Are you pleased with what you hear?
- Try practicing your Elevator Pitch or self-introduction on video or with a friend, mentor, coach or colleague. What impression do they get?
- Try searching Voice and Presence online. What programs, books, audios or resources can help you develop a compelling voice with which to present yourself as a leader?

Your Voice: A Secret Weapon

The fact that, of the six steps on the Journey to a Board Seat, one of them is Voice and Presence should tell you how very important it is to attend to this aspect of your image. From what I know of executive leaders, especially women, it may also be the most neglected. People think their voice “is what it is” – but nothing could be further from the truth. You can strengthen your voice and strengthen your reputation if you think about not just what you say, but how you say it.

Next Steps for You

Before you go back to your day, set a next step for yourself related to your voice. What assignment would you like to give yourself to develop this essential element of your executive presence?

Coming Soon

Join me next time when we continue pursuing the way you present yourself to others we move to the next step on the journey: **Identifying Thought Leadership and Presentation.**