

# Look me in the eye!



## Ewan Pearson

**N**ot all the time, but most of the time. What's interesting is when presenters break eye contact (gaze aversion), because they typically do it when it's worst to do so.

Thankfully, especially if you've been following our article on the voice, I am not going to show you a cross-section of an eye ball. Although I am tempted. No, this article is just about the absence of crucial eye contact through the end of a key phrase, and we don't need no gory picture to help do that.

It's struck me that the clients we've worked with typically share one bad habit when they come to present, pitch, sell, or negotiate which they tend not to do in a media interview. No, not scratching or picking some inappropriate part of themselves, but what psychologists call 'gaze aversion'.

Gaze aversion has many facets, but here I only want to share the problem it creates for presenters. When we speak to people, we look at them. Not all the time, but easily the majority of the time.

Unless we're in places like Japan or China where culturally it should be less. If it's one person, we look at them about 60-75% of the time, if a group, then that figure applies to the group as a whole. So if you are in an audience of say 5 people, you may 'get the eye' for about 15% of the time. If the presenters are good, this 1-1 activity will be what we call 'focussed eye-to-eye contact', i.e. each looking at the other person's eyes for a beat or two. That's all 'yeah but, no but' information. What's interesting is when presenters break eye contact (gaze aversion), because they typically do it when it's the worst moment to do so.

They break eye contact as they finish saying something, and instead of looking the audience in the eyes, presenters habitually look down, or at the screen especially if there are pretty visuals on it or the floor. Often this accompanies a loss of volume

and/or mumbling. This is wrong as it is dismissive of what has just been said, or suggests a lack of self-confidence, or a lack of belief in the point just made. That's all a bit daft. And it happens whether what they just said was drivel or the most important thing in the whole event, so unimportance is not the source of the error. No, it's just we humans get it wrong because few have ever been told about the effect. Well now you have.

Try this little practical. Go up to someone, shake hands with them, say 'hello' and look away or down or at someone else as you say the word. Not nice

for the other person! Now try it and hold the eye contact beyond the end of the 'hello' for a second or so. You should find that instead of offending your recently ex-friend, you have built rapport, and shown confidence and sincerity to them. Then you can look somewhere else if you want to. Now try it when finishing a point in a presentation. Just hold on to

that eye contact for a second or two beyond the end of the last word, and you'll find there's an enormous change in effect for a tiny change in behaviour. It's not instinctive, but it is natural and right.

There's at least one moment (and keep it brief) when it's actually better to avert your gaze. That's before you start saying a point. Pedants will realise that this is the end part of the pause after the previous point, so full marks to you. It's when you can check your notes, script or slides to check what you think you'll say next is what you want to say next. There have been some almighty gaffes by supposedly good presenters who missed this trick! They then spend considerable time regretting their error.

So keep those eye balls up!



Great eye contact

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## Advice squeezed straight from the experts



# Imperfect pitch



## Sarah Cottam

There is a woman who frequently travels on my evening train, usually chatting on the phone. Often it is the conversation that attracts or distracts you, but in this case, it's simply the sound of her voice. Listening to her makes my ears hurt so much that I either want to move carriage or hand her my card pleading for her to have voice coaching, I'll even do it for free! What's wrong? Well, she's forcing her voice to a higher pitch than is natural for her and you can hear the strain and injury she's causing as she does so. If she were a car, you would rush her into a garage to have her fixed in fear that she might soon spontaneously combust. Whilst British etiquette has so far prevented me from forcing a business card into her hands, it has started me thinking about how many more are out there like her. So I did some digging.

Did you know that as many as 10% of adults have vocal disorders at any one time? This includes: laryngitis, nodules, polyps and ulcers and are usually the result of vocal misuse. When you calculate it, that's about 6 million people in the UK. A common vocal misuse, regularly reported in papers from linguistic centres such as UCL and Geneva University, is that many of us do not speak at our natural (modal) pitch but instead speak at a habitual pitch, which is either too high or too low. Why? Well, this is mainly due to social upbringing or peer group pressure, whilst a small minority are caused by specific vocal problems.

The pitch of your voice is conditioned in two ways:

First by the physical vocal equipment you have and secondly, by external influences. It is this latter conditioning that causes the habitual pitch. As we grow up, the calibration of our pitch is greatly affected by auditory feedback, from ones own voice and the voices of those that we are influenced by. Whilst this is a natural process, the external influences can cause a person to force their voice into something that doesn't naturally fit their physical equipment.

There are many reasons for adopting a habitual pitch including: regional accent, perceptions of character (for example, a higher pitch may be deemed to give the impression of innocence, and a lower pitch is often associated with authority), and perceived social status requirements.

Somewhat surprisingly, the lowering of pitch for women is a more common form of vocal misuse than the increase in pitch, and it's been given its own name, of Bogart-Bacall syndrome (named after their low-pitched voices not because they had the disorder). I can find nothing to explain exactly why this misuse occurs although many reports make an unsubstantiated link towards women competing with men in the workplace.

To produce either a higher-pitched or lower-pitched voice requires considerable muscular tension. Continuous misuse of the voice in this way can contribute to muscle tension dysphonia - a loss of voice due to tension of the muscles that control the voice. People suffering from this disorder



Test your vocal pitch anywhere – well almost!

## Imperfect pitch

continued . . .

experience vocal fatigue and often strain to continue speaking, needing to rest their voice regularly.

So how do you determine your natural pitch range? The way that you say 'mm-hmm' as if you are agreeing with someone, or a vocalised yawn, or a victorious laugh (ha, ha, haaaa), are all usually around the middle of your natural pitch range. This is where the larynx is at its most relaxed and both pitch and volume are at their most effective.

Try this exercise to find your habitual pitch range:

Open your mouth wide and breath in, causing yourself to yawn. Then let the air out slowly with the mouth still wide open

Repeat this to yawn a second time but then make a noise as you let the air out, sounding something like ahhhhh (but don't change the shape of your mouth to make the noise). This should feel and sound comfortable and relaxed

Repeat the yawn again but this time have a go at a changing the pitch of the sound you make with the outward breath, starting wherever comes most naturally and then go up and down in pitch. But still keep the mouth wide and don't force the sound. You will find that you can only produce a reduced range in pitch. This is your natural (modal) pitch range

Repeat this yawn a fourth time and start with making the same noises on the outward breath and continue into saying a short phrase of normal speaking like "how are you today".

By establishing your natural (modal) pitch, and ensuring that you are not forcing your voice out of this range, you will find speaking easier, healthier and more rewarding. Now this girl on the train, how about I slip this article into her bag accidentally on purpose, or will that just cause me a black eye?

## Make me a deal ...

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creative by thinking laterally and looking to solve problems.

Let's go back to the challenge my friend had raised earlier:

"Go on, make me a deal!" (Desire)

"What sort of deal do you want?" (Willingness)

"An exchange of something. I'll happily give you money if I get something in return." (Desire)

"Well, I could offer you my time and skills. How does that sound?" (Willingness)

"Interesting. What are you good at?" (Willingness)

"I can paint and decorate." (Willingness)

"Can you hang pictures?" (Willingness)

"Yes". (Willingness)

"Good. I'll sponsor you £125 to hang some pictures in my hall. What else can you do?" (Willingness)

"Well, there's my job. I guess I could offer you my coaching services..." (Willingness)

I'm happy to say that my friend is now an excited, new GPB client. I'm also looking forward to being cooked lunch when I go round to hang her pictures

in a few weeks. As far as my sponsorship goes, the result of my negotiations with her have raised 50% of my finances to date.

Hopefully, this example shows how it is possible to turn a potentially antagonistic negotiation into a synergistic one. To help this you can also ask the other party if they are willing to get creative as they might be surprised by the result they create. The key then is to remain open and keep on using the language of willingness. An important reminder to keep you on track is that you are looking to create possibilities that didn't exist before. So, go on, make me a deal!

Tips to create the language of willingness:

- Ask the question: "Are you up for creating something that could benefit us both?"
- Look to solve problems and create opportunities with any challenge
- Stay as non-judgemental as possible
- Ask lots of open/exploring questions
- View the process as an exchange of creative energy
- Have some fun.



# Make me a deal ...



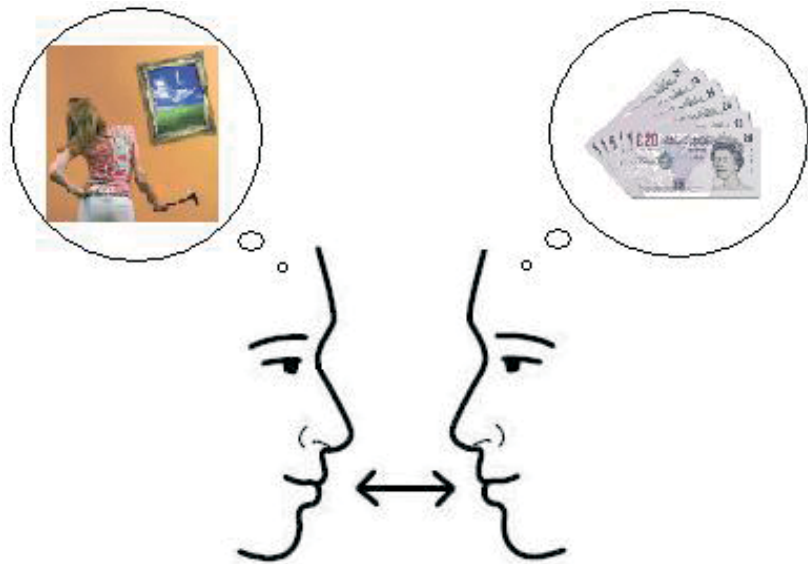
## Tim Farish

**M**y previous article showed how an understanding of the language of four different motivational states (impossibility, survival, obligation and desire) can help you when negotiating. The fifth state, 'willingness', has a language all of its own and lends itself to a particular negotiating style that allows both parties to create exciting new possibilities.

I recently wrote a letter to 17 people I knew asking for financial sponsorship for a charity. In the letter, I explained all the reasons why I thought they were giving to a worthy cause and signed off by saying

own language. An antagonistic negotiator sees things in terms of winning or losing in a deal and is focussed on getting the best result for themselves. Their language doesn't move from the states of impossibility, survival, obligation or desire. It's also the style that most people default to when they negotiate.

A synergistic negotiator looks at solving problems and creating something other than a simple exchange of goods and services. They seek to create something bigger by looking at what the two parties can create together. So this approach



Creative negotiations

that I would be calling each individual to discuss any concerns before they pledged money. The first few calls were straightforward and money was pledged willingly without concern.

But then one of the calls resulted in the challenge: "Go on, make me a deal!" It dawned on me that I was being asked to offer something other than gratitude and a credit for St. Peter at the pearly gates in return. This particular person was used to being regularly 'pestered' for sponsorship and now wanted any future donation to be a trade. It was clear we were now into a negotiation.

There are two ways you can negotiate: antagonistically or synergistically and each has its

involves coming into the negotiation with a completely different mindset and language.

Therefore, the first question to ask yourself is "what approach do I want to take?" If the other person is willing to follow the synergistic approach then new, exciting possibilities can be created. The language of willingness is all about being open to new possibilities and this often begins by asking open questions i.e. "What can we create together? What could be in it for both of us? How can we get creative with what we both want?" If you are able to build rapport and common ground then there is a good chance that something special can be created. Willingness also has an ability to be

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## Our Services

Grant Pearson Brown Consulting is a respected adviser. We enhance the performance of businesses, helping clients to excel in the use of the spoken word, improving the performance of individuals and teams. Over the long term our work improves the way a firm does business.

We coach and advise individuals to perform at their best in the toughest situations including: Presentations, New Business Pitches, Business Development, Negotiating, Media Interviews and Telephone Calls.

Our clients' needs are the only focus of our work; we listen to them and closely tailor our response to deliver first class coaching and advice. Through our own innovative culture we selectively pursue new ideas and approaches, continually hone our advice and create tools such as Voice Analysis, Prospect Relationship Management (PRM) and the GPB Virtual Classroom.