



Long live the telephone, the modern saviour

The GPB team

How to communicate effectively on telephone and video conference calls.

“The telephone gives us the happiness of being together yet safely apart.” Mason Cooley. How apt just now...

We're not sure about all of you, but within two weeks we have entirely switched from face-to-face to communicating by phone and video conference. Emails of course continue, but there seems to be a sense of boredom with emails, with messaging apps like WhatsApp and Slack taking up the - err - slack.

But what really makes the difference is HOW the phone is used for group conversations. There is a metaphorical 'microphone' being passed around, grabbed by some, shared too often, and not given to others. A protocol is needed, especially where you don't know all the other voices well. Even with only one or two 'new' voices, we can all get confused about who is talking. Add to that the habit we have of talking over each other and you get the gist of the problem. So here's our suggested protocol for group phone calls:

We want to help our clients to cope well with this very difficult coronavirus pandemic by sharing some ideas on how best to use this newly reinvigorated phone and video conference technology, whose use is now booming to the point where it is even showing signs of feeling the strain - Microsoft Teams crashed briefly in mid-March.

Let's do this in two parts, the good ol' telephone, and then the video conference. The phone provides what we describe as '1.9' channel communication. The visual channel is of course absent, but that should leave 2.0 channels - the words and the voice. However, on land lines (remember those?) the voice component is reduced by being transmitted through very old copper cable technology that reduces the data in the signal to about 1/10th of what's generally available via the modern microphone. To the naked ear it sounds ok, but the reduced data cuts out a lot of the nuances and subtleties in the spoken word. Mobiles bypass the copper bits, but the signal is often pretty awful too, so a lot is lost in processing and transmission.



It is important not to talk over each other (Image source: Unsplash.com)

1. Have/appoint a call host. Their job is to take the call through the list of topics, and to manage who is speaking when. It is a job for a diplomat, and not someone who speaks first and thinks second.
2. The host needs a list of who is on the call, should check this one at a time by name, and then should use simple techniques such as using someone's name before passing the 'microphone' on. This call management is the most important element of a good group call. It does not matter who does it, but the person in role should not be vague about it; It's a job that someone has to do.
3. If the above is being done well, keep

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By The GPB team

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quiet until called to speak by the host. Before (or when) you start, think hard about how best to say what you want to contribute.

4. Mute your phone to cut out noises off, until just before speaking. Put it back on mute afterwards.
5. It's vital to be clear, concise and complete. Don't mumble, instead '*make your consonants sound out like pistol shots*'.²
6. The absence of a visual channel means your vocal cues must be very clear, and if you want to continue speaking after a pause, that pause will have to be a little shorter than in video calls.
7. Get the microphone in the right place; too loud is just as bad as too quiet. If asked to speak up, move the mic closer, and/or speak louder.
8. We don't need lots of 'yeahs', 'umms', or 'great' from random voices, although positive and humorous comments are to be welcomed generally, and particularly just now.
9. When you speak, say your name first, unless specifically given the 'mic' by the host.
10. Finish your comments definitively with a vocal or verbal signal, don't tail off, fade out or restart after people think you have finished.

Second, video conferencing, '*The day will come when the man at the telephone will be able to see the distant person to whom he is speaking.*'³ Alexander Graham Bell.

In a similar way to phone calls, video calls do not quite have the full three channels. Yes you can see the person/people you are talking to, and there is little loss of signal on the video, but again you do have to be watching closely to pick up the nuances and subtle cues and tells given by the others on the video call.

There are lots of alternatives out there – WhatsApp, Zoom, WebEx, Microsoft Teams, StarLeaf, and GoToMeeting to name just a few. They are all a bit different, but the first two seem to cover all bases pretty well, at either no or low cost.

Let's just briefly mention that you do have to be pointing the camera in the right direction and on the right zoom setting, which can easily be done by buying a decent smartphone tripod.

Here are our protocols then for video conferencing calls:

1. Most of the group phone call protocols above still apply.
2. The chair can now be seen, so ensure that the visual cues are clear, and try to give everyone a similar opportunity with the microphone. Try to control 'mic hogging'.
3. As chair, pointing at the image of a person on your screen is unlikely to be in the direction of that person!
4. When speaking, look at the camera lens (not your main screen) the majority of the time, say 60-80%, unless you move to voiceover on screen images such as slides, in which case refer to the protocol on phone calls above. It's OK to look away more if it's clear that you are using more than one screen, but do try to keep the eye contact % up all the same.
5. When not speaking, remember you are still visible, so don't do anything you don't want seen!
6. If you want to speak, signal this visually and clearly. It's great to have this facet, which is so difficult to deploy on phone calls.

There, some ideas that we hope will help make your calls more effective in these troubling times. Happy social distancing....

By the GPB Team (working from homes in and around London).

1. <https://www.azquotes.com/quotes/topics/telephones.html>. Mason Cooley, an American aphorist. He was Professor Emeritus of French, speech and world literature at the College of Staten Island.
2. Often recited over several decades by Harry Pearson, the 101 year old father of one of the co-founders of GPB.
3. <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/687083?ref=telephones>. Attributed to Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone.

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Breaking down the breakdown of communication

Richard discusses the illusion of transparency and the need for clear and impactful communication techniques.



Richard Keith

There is a quote in our business often attributed to George Bernard Shaw: *'the single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.'*

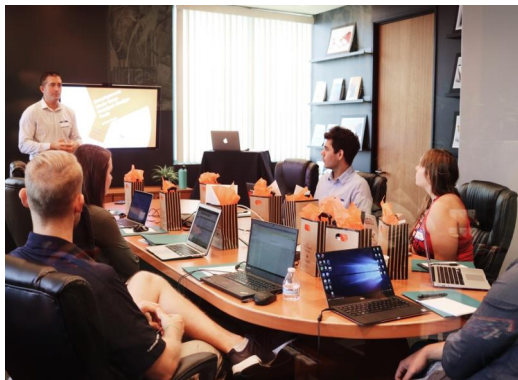
USA sums this up clearly: *'Most people believe that they are better communicators than they really are. Similarly, most people believe that their intentions and goals are more apparent than is actually the case.'*¹

Whilst running a presentation skills workshop earlier this week I found myself saying something that I have brought up many times before: a key part of our job as communication skills consultants is to align what people *feel* they are doing when they communicate with what is *actually coming across* to an audience or counterparty. A mismatch in these two areas can cause various problems: but where does such a misalignment stem from?

Scientists in the world of communication call this the *'illusion of transparency'*² - overestimating the degree to which your interior emotional state or objectives can be perceived by others.

This concept has been explored in relation to public speaking and presenting, demonstrating how speakers often feel the negatives of their performance can be seen or heard to a far greater extent by an audience that is the case in reality.

None of us like to think that we are subjective. We see it in others, of course: we look at their purchasing, political and even personal choices, and we can observe how they are either ignorant of - or simply ignoring - the glaring evidence suggesting their decision is wrong. But we surely aren't like that, are we?!



Presenting at work (image source: Unsplash.com)

It must, though, also be thought of in relation to persuasion, especially if we remember the need for congruence (the matching of the voice to the visual and to the content) in order to make your communication as compelling as

possible. If you are nervous, for instance, the research suggests that this will not necessarily come across in the way you think it does; the flip side, of course, is that if you do actually feel happy or excited about a particular topic, client or opportunity, that may not necessarily be what you are communicating to your audience.

The truth is that we all suffer from blinkered subjectivity to some extent, some more than others. This creates certain problems, one of which is that it can lead to the self-centered although possibly subconscious belief that other people will see and understand our feelings and motivation without us expressing them clearly.

It is easy to see how assuming that others can tell how we feel about something can reduce effective communication; one key way is that we may choose not to say something because we feel, even subconsciously, that it doesn't need to be articulated.

Leigh Thompson, Professor of Dispute Resolutions and Organizations at Kellogg School of Management in the

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Even if we do decide to say something - in a meeting, for example - we may not do so in a particularly clear or direct way, again probably because we feel such clarity is unnecessary.

This is one contributing factor to another related issue in the world of business: the *'uneven communication problem.'* This is the label given to how certain people can dominate discourse to an unproductive extent:

'In a typical four person group, two people do 62% of the talking'³.

to quote Leigh Thompson again, *'The evidence suggests that in a typical four person group, two people do 62% of the talking, and in a six person group three people do 70%'³, and so it grows.*

Perhaps most striking point in her research is the obliviousness these individuals have to the overbearing dominance of their voice within the room (remember that subjectivity I mentioned at the beginning of the article?). The perception by such individuals that they are giving everyone equal opportunities to speak freely and not unduly influencing contributions.

Such a failure in communication can lead to crucial information not being shared and so can increase the chances of a business making poor decisions. It may also lead to members of a team feeling less valued, and so damage essential rapport between colleagues.

The *'illusion of transparency'* and the *'uneven communication problem'* are barriers to the clear, accurate and timely communication that all firms need. So what can you do about them?

For starters, you can work to develop greater empathy; developing the ability to see the world from someone else's point of view should help reduce the view that everyone can see and feel whatever you see and/or feel.

Secondly, to help ensure people are completely clear about what you think or feel you can use certain rhetorical techniques such as mini-summaries; and you can develop more effective

meeting management skills such as developing clear agendas and stronger facilitation abilities to ensure you receive contributions from all staff in a valuable way.

Finally, in the spirit of clear and direct communication I should also say that you can work with consultants like ourselves! We at GPB have spent years helping clients with this and many other communication problems to help ensure you remain as clear, impactful and persuasive as you need to be.

By Richard Keith



Clear, accurate and timely communication (image source: Unsplash.com)

1. Leigh Thompson (2013), *Creative Conspiracy: The New Rules of Breakthrough Collaboration*, Harvard Business Review Press; Boston, MA, p.126

2. Savitsky, Kenneth; Gilovich, Thomas (2003). ["The illusion of transparency and the alleviation of speech anxiety"](#) . *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. 39 (6): 618-625

3. Leigh Thompson quoted in Matthew Syed (2019), *Rebel Ideas: the Power of Diverse Thinking* (John Murray Publishing: London).

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Striking the Balance

Lynda considers some aspects of effective communication which need care and preparation.



Lynda Russell-Whitaker

If you can, in these turbulent times, cast your mind back to a time when you were going about your normal, daily routine. It's likely that, at some point over the last month or two, you were on public transport; a train, a bus or the tube. An aeroplane, perhaps. There was probably more than one occasion when you overheard a conversation between two of your fellow passengers, within easy eavesdropping distance.

this is referred to as 'Register'; another is your physical proximity to a conversation partner.

Our choice of language can create closer psychological proximity, or greater distance. The latter is very topical at the moment.

'Human perceptions of space [...] are shaped and patterned by culture'

For more on this highly relevant topic, read Anthropologist Edward T. Hall's theory of proxemics*, first developed and published in 'The Hidden Dimension' (1966).

It's surprising just how many *disfluencies* you may have heard. When in the natural flow of a conversation with someone we know well, a few of us may be fairly fluent, but for most, our speech pattern is likely to be littered with them!

published in 'The Hidden Dimension' (1966).

Hall's Proxemic Theory argues that human perceptions of space, although derived from sensory apparatus that all humans share, are shaped and patterned by culture. His work has had a major impact on a number of disciplines, including of course communication theory.

Regular readers of SpeakUp! will know what these disfluencies are, but I'll mention them here to those who aren't: umms/errs, repetition or rephrasing; fillers, such as 'you know', 'kind of' and 'like'; and hesitation pauses (that is, not deliberate ones).

Our sensitivity to proximity will depend on context, as well as our cultural background. We behave differently and have more or less space between us, depending on the circumstance. One might think of it as a kind of spectrum, from having a private chat with a close friend, engaging in live debate at a friend's party, presenting at a small meeting at work, to delivering an address in front of hundreds of people.

Although we will want to maintain an element of naturalness, approachability and warmth, when delivering a speech or presentation to a larger audience, we will all also want to avoid an excessive rate of disfluencies. Science suggests that excessive means more than 5 per minute in total, all types.



We use language to distance ourselves from others but also to bring us closer together (image source: unsplash.com)

Other elements to consider include your choice of language, for example between formal and informal. In language teaching,

you're unlikely to offend someone (when it comes to personal space), whilst addressing your staff at a large

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company event, you may unwittingly create more psychological (as opposed to physical) distance between you than intended or desired.

This isn't necessarily about inclusivity or exclusivity, although we might use language to include or exclude others. This is more about formal and informal language; how close or distant, polite or direct we choose to be.

We don't always consciously create language that distances or includes. But we will usually employ a mix in most situations. You might use the third person singular, the 'polite' form (he/she/they), instead of the first person plural (we) to exclude a person or a thing from a group, and to distance yourself from them.



You need to think about your audience before you create your presentation (Image source: Unsplash.com)

Register of language

Martin Joos¹ describes five styles of Register: Frozen or Static, Formal, Consultative, Casual and Intimate. Two close friends chatting on public transport will probably use informal language. If you were in a meeting at work, you would likely modify this slightly, though perhaps not to the extent that you would if you were speaking at a conference, or giving an address at a state dinner.

Some people, particularly the younger generation are uncomfortable using formal or very polite language when speaking in public. However, when speaking, we need to consider the listener, our audience. This is even more crucial when there is a mix of cultures in the room. A Venezuelan friend of mine, when ordering a takeaway Arepa from a roadside café, might say "give me...", rather than "could you please...", but we would think that rude in the UK! Linguistics Professor, Robin Lakoff, in her paper,

'The logic of politeness: minding your p's and q's' (1973), put forward three maxims, (also known as her '*politeness principles*') that show consideration for the listener:

- Don't impose
- Give options
- Make your receiver feel good.

That doesn't sound too onerous to me, and it's unlikely to make you seem stiff and unapproachable, a concern for those uncomfortable with being too polite, or formal.

In classical rhetoric, this is part of 'decorum', or if you prefer, appropriateness.

Decorum applies not only to your speaking style but also gestures, facial expressions, stance or posture, and what you are wearing. It should also take into

consideration your vocal tone, speed of speech, modulation and volume. If you're addressing a large audience, adjustments need to be considered. This brings to mind the difference between television and theatre acting; where in the latter, everything has to be more exaggerated.

In conclusion, know who your audience comprises, and your objective, before developing a presentation and during your delivery. With 'Decorum', remember that, as with many things in life, a smattering of the antithesis of appropriateness can keep your audience's interest. It's all about striking the balance.

by Lynda Russell-Whitaker

*Hall's distinctions of personal space are: Intimate space, Social and Consultative Space, and Public Space.

1. Martin Joos, *The five clocks*. University of Texas. Pp. 53. (1961).

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And now for something completely different...



Ewan Pearson

Negotiators need to prepare well (phase 1) in advance of opening the dialogue (phase 2). Not everyone does...

Round 2 of the Brexit talks got under way officially on 2nd March, with the discussions no longer about the 'divorce' but about the deal/s that will exist between the UK and the EU after 31st December 2020. This time things feel very different.

The posturing in the media started somewhat earlier with both sides saying, with gloves off, that they are going to be darned tough negotiators. They elaborated by sharing what their 'Red Lines' are, what's impossible (already??!) and how they want the negotiation to play out. There is little that meets eye to eye so far.



Round 2: Boris meets Von der Leyen, at 10 Downing Street. Source: twitter.

Indeed, this preamble has set the scene for a classically good negotiation, which we at GPB define as the process by which parties with differences at the start, use a set of discussions and compromises to try to reach agreement. If there were no differences, there would be no need for a negotiation.

The fact that there clearly are differences means that to settle terms, one side or both will have to make concessions, usually both. We always suggest that these concessions should be of low cost to you and high value to them. But that's not always possible, so sometimes, agreeing terms is often time-consuming, costly and painful.

Negotiations are emotional activities. They involve a lot of psychology, including the feelings about the other party, yourself and the outcome, and these can change after a deal is done if new information comes to light. "I'd have done it for less/more" can tip how you feel about a deal after it's been done on its head.

They are also supposed to be hard work, so that the outcome is, well, somewhat satisfying. Again, that's an emotion. You can reflect that you did 'well' to get the deal done at all, on terms that you and your team feel was a 'win-win', and that it took lots of time, effort, and changes of package and people. I am though still puzzled after many years as an advisor here that both teams can 'win'. That never happens in sport. A draw seems the nearest to that.

Brexit Round 2 feels very different from Round 1, which was about the divorce deal, along with a statement of intent for Round 2 that was non-binding. It's controversial to take any position, but my view is that the UK planned and started Round 1 poorly, and that affected the result.



Round 1 (Davis v Barnier), 7th July 2017. Source: twitter.

We were too meek to say we might walk away, and we asked for nothing in return when Barnier handed us his sequence for settling terms. The UK submitted meekly to the

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timing, location, phases and demands of Barnier and his team. As a result the UK did not strike an acceptable deal, with the UK Parliament rejecting Theresa May's deal three times. Just for the record that happened on 15 January, 14 March, and 29 March. It was voted down again on 22 October 2019, and the vote was finally passed under the Boris Johnson government on 20 December 2019.

If you look at our diagram below, you'll see that we have identified four phases in a typically well-run negotiation:

- Phase 1 is the planning and preparation
- Phase 2 is the exchange of information, which is best followed by further planning and preparation
- Phase 3 is the haggling bit which usually involves the trading of concessions, and
- Phase 4 is the wrapping up of the deal that both parties think has been done.

All phases are tricky, but we find that the greatest errors are made *not* in the haggling, but in the preparation and exchange of information. In the 2017 negotiation, the flaws started at the very beginning with a psychologically

weak position, a desire to 'stay close to the EU' undermining the team's negotiation mentality. Their attempts to develop better mindsets, for example by threatening a 'no deal Brexit', were laughed out of town.

This time round, the posturing was both ways, which felt awkward but a lot more balanced. Whilst if anything the pressure on the UK seems greater due to the shortage of time before the (arbitrary) deadline, of 31st Dec 2020, the genuine threat of a walk-away with both sides losing out has created a much better starting point. In a sense, we *would* want to be starting from here.

Yes there were threats, claims of breach of commitment, challenges, threats of walk-aways, and red lines. The Relative Powers of authority, precedent, competition and time were very obvious to see.

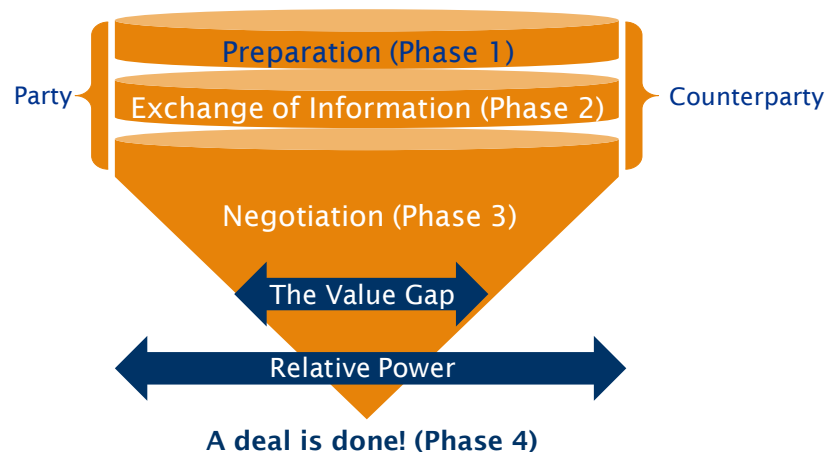
Whilst we don't recommend in general that our clients do public posturing, we do think Phase 1 of a negotiation should be an Exchange of Information, before the haggling starts. At least that is being done this time round. I can't wait for the fun to start.

By Ewan Pearson

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GPB's PE Negotiation funnel



'They that have the voice of lions'¹ ... and of lionesses



Desmond discusses the effect of pitch heights and other vocal aspects in both genders.

Shakespeare's *Cressida*¹ refers us to an animal admired for its authoritative 'voice'. Both male and female lions deploy 'very loud and low-frequency vocalization'² to communicate effectively over long distances. While lion cubs, by contrast, make quieter, higher-pitched sounds. These cub vocalisations carry much less authority, and less distance - partly to reduce the threat level posed by wily and voracious predators.



Pitch Height: Be More Lion/Lioness!
Image source: quora.com

The way humans sound when we speak can also be a powerful tool, for persuasion and leadership. But do we always use our voices to maximum effect? And with the recent rapid rise in remote (rather than face-to-face) contact, in the wake of Coronavirus concerns, are we aware of just how important a communication tool our voices really are?

The following quote, attributed to composer Richard Strauss, might explain why so many of us need help to speak with more lion-like authority; but also, simultaneously, with authenticity: '*The human voice is the most beautiful instrument of all, but it is the most difficult to play*'.³ Although it's just possible Strauss was thinking about singing, as much as speaking.

There are many ways in which we can improve our vocal delivery, to give the most accurate and positive impression possible of our true selves. One method is deepening our **Pitch Height** (PH). This measures the average number of your vocal cords' vibration

cycles per second - their Fundamental Harmonic (F_0) - expressed in Hertz. Which dictates how 'high' or 'deep' your voice sounds to a listener. It's something we can all actively influence. More vibrations give a higher pitch; fewer vibrations a deeper one. It's a vocal characteristic about which some people suspect latent gender bias, as we shall see.

Anatomically, in both genders, a deeper voice is produced by longer vocal chords. A large body of research shows that deeper voices convey more authority, gravitas and seniority. More 'Lion/Lioness', as it were. This perception is true for audiences of both genders, when hearing both male and female voices. Since deeper PH positively affects audience perceptions of a speaker's competence and credibility, it can be beneficial to deepen your vocal pitch, especially if it's higher than your gender average. This might explain why both Margaret Thatcher and David Beckham, to name just two famous examples, both had voice coaching which noticeably deepened their PH.

*'The Human Voice is the most beautiful instrument of all'*³

At GPB we are occasionally asked whether women's voices are naturally disadvantaged in terms of perceived gravitas by being, on average, higher than those of men. The simple answer is that, despite a noticeable average PH difference, there's little evidence this delivers an intrinsic advantage for male speakers. In both genders, deeper voices project more authority and persuasiveness to a similar degree.

A different view was taken by Dame Mary Beard, the high-profile Cambridge University Classics Professor, who spoke from a cultural perspective in March 2014 about aspects of voice and



Desmond Harney

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Cont...

Our Services

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- the Information Iceberg,
- Client s' Rights Act,
- Feature, Benefit Impact (FBI),
- Buyers' Criteria Analysis, (BCA), and
- our Q&A Methodology.

gender⁴. She noted derogatory labels sometimes assigned to women's discourse, such as: "strident", "stupid", "whingeing" and "whining". Describing these as representing "attitudes, assumptions and prejudices hard-wired into ... our culture, our language and our history". That may well have been true then, but it is very much to be hoped this landscape has shifted positively, in the six years since her talk.

She also claimed, "there is no neurological reason for us to hear low-pitched voices as more authoritative than high-pitched ones". Which may be correct - but does not alter the fact that, rightly or wrongly, the body of psychological and sociological research shows this to be precisely how we *do* assess each other. In the cases of male and female listeners, for both female and male speakers.



Dame Mary Beard (image source: BT.com)

Regardless of comparative PH considerations, however, it's worth noting that female voices on average exhibit a wider **Pitch Range** (PR) than those of men. This is the difference between the highest and deepest extents of vocal pitch, rather than their average. 'Males often speak at 65 to 260 Hertz, while females speak in the 100 to 525 Hz range'⁵. These example figures show there's both a significant overlap between average female and male PR - in the 100 to 260 Hz range - AND, typically, a far more extensive female range.

This broader female PR provides a

potential vocal advantage which can help make women sound more pleasant than men. That pleasantness results from the greater amount of **Pitch Modulation (PM)** available to women - the degree to which PH moves up and down in a pattern, during speech. A well-modulated and natural pitch pattern can gain and retain greater audience attention, so long as it is not used to excess.

Overall, GPB's advice is not to get 'hung up' on concerns of gender bias in regard to comparative **PH**, since evidence suggests no natural disadvantage exists. Although we should all focus on deepening our vocal pitch, if it is higher than our gender average. This will help project increased authority (like those Kings and Queens of the jungle) - and improve our persuasiveness.

But we should prioritise other, more critical vocal improvements: e.g. in our active use of **PR** and **PM**. Not least in these, our remote-working 'Virus Times'. When phone contact levels (without all those helpful visual cues, nuances and subtleties) have suddenly increased dramatically. GPB research reveals that **Range** and **Modulation** represent rather more significant issues for many more of our clients than does **Pitch Height**.

By Desmond Harney

1. Cressida, in 'Troilus and Cressida' by William Shakespeare [Act 3, Scene 2, Line 89]
2. Sarah A. Klemuk, Tobias Riede, Edward J. Walsh, Ingo R. Titze. 'Adapted to Roar: Functional Morphology of Tiger and Lion Vocal Folds'. PLoS ONE, 2011; 6 (11): e27029 DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0027029
3. QuoteTab. 2020. *Richard Strauss Quotations At Quotetab*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.quotetab.com/quotes/by-richard-strauss>>.
4. Mary Beard: 'The Public Voice of Women': London Review of Books Lecture, 20th March 2014 - <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n06/mary-beard/the-public-voice-of-women>
5. University of Iowa - Voice Academy: <https://uiowa.edu/voice-academy/male-female-voices>

