

## IT'S TIME FOR A VOICE REALITY CHECK!

by Joni Wilson

*Books are my passion* but I don't have much time to read so I buy audio books and slip them into my tape deck while I'm driving. Now I will admit as a voice coach I might be a bit over sensitive to the sound of someone's voice but (Lord help us!), when an unskilled author reads his or her book on audiotape and the voice coming through the speakers sounds like an overfed crow with a digestive problem. Ouch!

I love words and I love the sound of the human voice and when these two come together in harmony it's a delight to the ears. I'm not talking about perfection here, but as authors, we owe it to those who spend their time and money on us to give them our best. Not only our best written words, but our best vocal sounds when reading those words. When an author's voice grates on my ears and my nerves, I can't even hear their words. What a waste!

### Author Alert!!

Today more than ever those who use the voice excessively for interviews, speeches, and seminars are experiencing vocal weakness and voice "blowouts". This can spell disaster on a book tour. It is so competitive out there that every little edge we lose pulls us further away from our success. What people don't realize is that vocal skills are just that, skills! The voice, like many other aspects of our human development is a *learned* response. In the beginning we learned to speak by imitating those around us. We all have the same basic voice parts. Although those parts may come in different sizes, the actual working mechanism is identical in all of us. Learning to respect your voice and use it correctly is the answer to all voice problems. You have two amazing vocal cords that make all of your vocal sounds but they can only do 20% of the work. The body must do the rest. Think of your voice as a fine tuned instrument and visualize yourself as the player. This instrument needs three ingredients to work effectively, air, acoustic space, and a relaxed body. Stress and tension wreak havoc on those precious vocal cords. (When stressed, we have all felt that dreaded "Lump in the throat" thing.) Along with learning proper breathing techniques and using our entire body to power and resonate the voice, we have to keep the voice happy for it to be healthy. Here are some good tips to help you do that:

### Five Things to Do to Keep the Voice Happy

1. **DO** drink water to keep your vocal cords moist and hydrated. The vocal cords are surrounded by mucous and need that mucous to survive. Hydrating the cords with water will help them to stay healthy. Avoid anything that robs the cords of their mucous covering. Excessive air-conditioners and heating systems suck the moisture out of the air and also out of your vocal cords.
2. If you have to use your voice, **DO NOT** take any decongestants that dry up your mucous. You are far better off with a dripping nose than two shriveled up vocal cords.
3. **DO NOT** clear your throat with a vengeance. The more you clear out the mucous, the more mucous will come to replace it. Remember, it is a protective coating. If you must clear the throat, do it as gently as you can.
4. If you are going to use your voice **DO NOT** drink anything that dehydrates the cords such as caffeine, (coffee, tea, Coke etc.). On the other hand, avoid anything that creates excess mucous such as dairy (milk, ice cream, cheese), and acid fruit juices (orange, grapefruit). By the way, if you are speaking at a dinner or breakfast meeting, do not eat before you speak. Digesting food can interfere with your voice performance.
5. **DO** drink herbal teas and warm liquids before and during your talk. The cords are membranes and shrink with anything cold. **NO ICE!** Warmth keeps them plumped up and happy.

Take the time to invest in your vocal image along with your wardrobe, head shots and media kits. Remember, "*A Good Voice is Good Business.*"

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