

BY LENNA RASSOOL



If you're struggling to make your voice heard, maybe it's time to tone it down a notch

Try having a conversation in a room full of people and you're likely to be drowned out by everyone else trying to do the same. Yet there's always one person who manages to grab everyone's attention like a vocal hypnotist. So what's in a voice? Research shows that 38% of communication is based on how we say things rather than *what* we say. We asked the experts what it takes to hold your own in a room full of talk.

HIT THE RIGHT NOTE

'Your tone, the level of excitement in your voice, the clarity with which you project it and your pitch all contribute to getting your message across,' says Monique Rissen-Harrisberg, CEO and founder of The Voice Clinic in South Africa. 'A rich and resonant voice projects confidence and inspires trust, and the more positive, energetic and focused you are, the more people will respond to you. Varying your inflection, volume levels and pace will help you sound more interesting and less as though you're droning on,' she says.

'A resonant voice is deep, low and rich, produced mainly from the chest,' says Delia Thompson, founder of The

Communication Academy in Pretoria. 'Women tend to have high-pitched, nasal voices and need to pay special attention to resonance. Always try to speak from the chest – it's the largest resonator, producing the richest sounds. Practise by putting your hand on your chest while speaking on the phone and ensure that you feel the sound vibrations in your chest, not your nose.'

'Also try consciously to lower your voice when speaking – a lower voice travels further. Practise your pitch by humming along to your favourite songs in as low a voice as you can manage.'

All our organs of articulation are muscles, or are controlled by muscles, which need to be kept strong and flexible, says Thompson. She suggests



Keira Knightley

was voted as the second-sexiest in Britain by the Royal National Institute of Blind People in 2005. (She was beaten to the

WHO DOES IT RIGHT?

★ **Keira Knightley's** well-articulated sounds are warm and pleasant to listen to, which is probably why her voice

post by Sir Sean Connery.)

★ **Amy Winehouse's** low voice has played a significant part in her hugely successful career as a singer. Her voice is very resonant and the sound produced is soothing and interesting.



Amy Winehouse

these exercises to achieve a crisp, clear voice:

- ★ Many people are lazy about opening their jaws when speaking. Break this habit and loosen your jaw ligaments by opening and closing your mouth as wide as possible 20 times a day.
- ★ Exercise your lips for correct vowel formation – practise saying EE-OO-EE-OO 20 times a day. Make sure you pull your lips back on EE and forwards on OO.

GRAND GESTURES

The remaining 62% of communication is split into 55% image and body language, with only seven percent involving what you're actually saying. 'Being congruent with your appearance, body language and voice equates trust,' says Rissen-Harrisberg.

'The way you stand or sit also affects your voice,' says Thompson. 'For an unstrained, natural voice you need an upright posture so that breathing isn't hampered. Keeping your chin up will also ensure that you're more audible.'

No matter what the topic, it's always important to focus on the image you'd like to project. These tips from Rissen-Harrisberg will help your body communicate better:

- ★ **Stand or sit comfortably** and maintain eye contact. Try to relax because how you feel also affects your posture, and it will show if you're uncomfortable.
- ★ **Avoid crossing your arms and legs** over each other or putting your hand in front of your mouth. These gestures 'close' your body language and make you appear defensive and less accessible. □