

*Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.*

*Robert Greenleaf*

## Module Four: Paraverbal Communication Skills



Have you ever heard the saying, “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it”? It’s true!

Try saying these three sentences out loud, placing the emphasis on the underlined word.

- “I didn’t say you were wrong.” (Implying it wasn’t me)
- “I didn’t say you were wrong.” (Implying I communicated it in another way)
- “I didn’t say you were wrong.” (Implying I said something else)

Now, let’s look at the three parts of paraverbal communication; which is the message told through the pitch, tone, and speed of our words when we communicate.

### The Power of Pitch



Pitch can be most simply defined as the key of your voice. A high pitch is often interpreted as anxious or upset. A low pitch sounds more serious and authoritative. People will pick up on the pitch of your voice and react to it. As well, variation in the pitch of your voice is important to keep the other party interested.

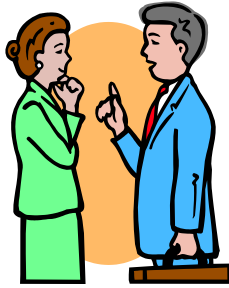
If you naturally speak in a very high-pitched or low-pitched voice, work on varying your pitch to encompass all ranges of your vocal cords. (One easy way to do this is to relax your throat when speaking.) Make sure to pay attention to your body when doing this – you don’t want to damage your vocal cords.

## The Truth about Tone

Did your mother ever say to you, “I don’t like that tone!” She was referring to the combination of various pitches to create a mood. (Speed, which we will discuss in the next module, can also have an effect on your tone.)

Here are some tips on creating a positive, authoritative tone.

- Try lowering the pitch of your voice a bit.
- Smile! This will warm up anyone’s voice.
- Sit up straight and listen.
- Monitor your inner monologue. Negative thinking will seep into the tone of your voice.



## The Strength of Speed



The pace at which you speak also has a tremendous effect on your communication ability. From a practical perspective, someone who speaks quickly is harder to understand than someone who speaks at a moderate pace. Conversely, someone who speaks v-e---r---y s---l---o---w---l---y will probably lose their audience’s interest before they get very far!

Speed also has an effect on the tone and emotional quality of your message. A hurried pace can make the listener feel anxious and rushed. A slow pace can make the listener feel as though your message is not important. A moderate pace will seem natural, and will help the listener focus on your message.

One easy way to check your pitch, tone, and speed is to record yourself speaking. Think of how you would feel listening to your own voice. Work on speaking the way you would like to be spoken to.

## Case Study

Jasmine was practicing her presentation for her research project with two colleagues, Omar and Jordan as an audience. Omar and Jordan were struggling to pay attention. Jasmine soon grew frustrated and lost some confidence in her presentation skills. Jordan suggested they identify Jasmine’s communication issue, and they soon worked out that Jasmine’s presentation was informative; it was her speaking style which was the problem. Jasmine realized that she was speaking too slowly, and was losing the interest of both Omar and Jordan as her audience. Jasmine tried speaking at a more moderate pace, and caught their attention. All three went home soon after, and Jasmine was happy that she enlisted the help of her colleagues.