

STRONG VOICE

Introduction

We've looked at getting the most out of our eyes – by standing where we can see and keeping looking (**Strategy 1: Radar and be seen looking**). We've looked at getting the most out of our body – taking a confident and relaxed stance (**Strategy 2: Assertive body language**). Now we want to think about getting the most out of our voice.

The words we choose matter: "Inside. Now." will elicit a very different response to "Come on ladies, time to get inside, then we can get your lunch served." But the same words can be delivered in many different ways. One training exercise for actors is to ask them to deliver the sentence "Please could I have a cup of tea" in as many ways as they can. An actor can use tone, pace and pauses to convey threat, affection, exhaustion, fear, or any other emotion. A prison officer can do the same: "Come on ladies" could be said with patience, desperation or contempt.

This is particularly important given that some prisoners may struggle to understand our words. A prisoner may have hearing difficulties, additional speech and language needs, or speak English as an additional language. Our tone of voice – combined with our body language and gestures – can help us communicate, particularly with these prisoners.

Most importantly, we want to project calm and confidence. Building on our confident posture (**Strategy 2: Assertive body language**), we want to speak from our lungs, using deep breaths, not from our throats. This makes the sound more powerful and preserves our voice. We also want to slow down and speak more deeply. The goal isn't to shout or to be too forceful: it's to be clear and confident in everything we say.

How can you pursue this strategy?

- A. **Stance:** Firstly, you want to plant your feet and open your body up. This helps you to project calm and confidence when delivering your message.
- B. **Tone:** You want to use a calm and confident tone when delivering your message. You want to avoid shouting because this can send the message that we have lost control or are panicked.
- C. **Voice:** Deeper sounds come from the lungs and the chest; higher sounds come from the throat. To project authority, we want a deeper tone. This means that we need to speak deeply from the lungs to project your voice.

Unlocked

When we practice you want to feel like the sound is coming from the base of your lungs.

- D. **Slow down:** We tend to speak faster when we're worried or under pressure, running our words together. This suggests a lack of confidence and makes it harder for prisoners and colleagues to understand what we're saying. To help with this we need to slow down by pausing between phrases and between words. Consider how you can pronounce each word clearly: emphasise the 'p' in stop, the 't' in that. This also helps to calm us down and allows us to choose our next words more carefully.

Potential Pitfalls

- **Shouting:** We want to be firm and forceful – but calm and measured. When we're frustrated, or worried, or under pressure, we may find ourselves raising our voice. There are rare occasions when a shout is needed – calling for help, for example. But in most situations, shouting suggests that we've lost control. If you find your voice raising in fear or anger, go back to the steps above: regain control by speaking more deeply and more slowly.

Case Study

Officer Stevenson is patrolling the landings during association. They notice two prisoners are talking and they decide to observe the interaction because it appears that the conversation is getting a little heated. Suddenly, one prisoner grabs the other's t-shirt, clenches his fist, and raises his voice and says: "Say that again...". At this point Officer Stevenson intervenes. They move as they speak. Their voice is raised and cracks. "Stop that!" is shouted with barely a gap before "Let go of him."

This is a **non-example** for several different reasons. Firstly, the officer reacts to the situation without thinking about their body language and their movement. They are moving and don't open their body up. Secondly, the officer speaks too fast meaning that the prisoners may not catch what they are saying. Finally, the officer fails to speak from their lungs and therefore their voice cracks resulting in their voice cracking.

An example would be if the officer stood still, planted their feet, and spoke deeply, from the chest and lungs, not the throat. They would also ensure that they are speaking at a slow pace to ensure that prisoners hear the message that they deliver.

Unlocked

Mitigations to using this technique

Consider the following questions to think about the circumstances when you would and wouldn't choose to use this technique:

- In which situations would you choose to use this technique?
- Would this technique be effective with all the prisoners that you work with?
- Would you adapt any aspect of this technique to better suit the context that you work in?

Final Reflection Questions

Answer these final questions to help to consolidate your learning and consider how you will use this technique in your day-to-day practice in your current working context.

- What is the goal? What are prison officers looking to achieve by using this technique?
- Why should this technique work? How should prisoners behave differently?
- What do you need to do? Outline the key success checks you need to meet to apply this technique?
- What are the pitfalls? When shouldn't we use this technique? What barriers do you foresee to using this technique? How could you overcome them?