

## LIFT UP YOUR VOICE

If you have worked on radio or the stage, and/or if your throat never feels strained after a long stretch at the microphone or in consecutive, if your voice never wavers or falters, if you never gasp for breath, if, in a word, you are completely relaxed at all times, then this article is not for you.

But wait a minute! Perhaps you have, just occasionally, heard a breathy voice when taking relay<sup>1</sup>? Then please read on and show these lines to the nameless (and rare) owners of those breathy voices.

Correct breathing, voice pitch and utterance are crucial for people whose business it is to speak all day. If you look up "Respiration" and "Voice" in any encyclopedia you will find out exactly what happens in the continuous process of breathing and the discontinuous act of phonation. It may make your mind reel to discover what a lot of complicated things our lungs, diaphragm, vocal chords, vocal folds, glottis and tongue (to name only a few) are doing all day long, as we sit in our beautifully ventilated booths or among our delegates in smoke-filled rooms.

It seems absurd for interpreters not to learn to perform all these complex processes with the greatest possible efficiency and economy of effort. It is utterly ridiculous that we should receive no tuition on this subject at school. There is indeed every reason why opportunities for adequate voice-training should be provided by all interpreters' schools. That is certainly not the case at present and I hope the Health Committee will soon be making appropriate representations to the heads of all the main schools, so that in future students may be given the necessary knowledge and skill from the start.

For all the rest of us, however, the Health Committee can do no more than offer advice and suggestions. We strongly recommend that those of you who have never had proper voice-training start taking lessons straight away - whatever your age or seniority in the profession. We also suggest that those who by some happy twist of chance have already acquired the technique encourage less fortunate colleagues to do likewise. All Members of the Health Committee have a list of voice-trainers in several European cities and will be glad to give their names and addresses to anyone who is interested.

There is a good book on the subject by Jean Fourel, entitled "Parlez Mieux... et Sans Fatigue" (Editions Ouvrières, price 12 FF). It contains relevant technical information, a great many useful exercises for strengthening the throat muscles and pitching one's voice correctly (a gramophone record is also available to help do these) and many more suggestions and exercises on how to achieve a flawless pronunciation and delivery in the French language. It also contains one golden maxim, which I wish we could print and somehow permanently affix to every microphone in every conference room in the world:

"Dites-vous bien qu'on dit, qu'on lit, qu'on parle toujours trop vite"

Helpful though Jean Fourel's book is, most people will find that a few personal lessons by a good teacher are indispensable. They will not require a very big investment - and in any case the return, in terms of increased poise and relaxation, makes it extremely worth while. I found that a course of 10 or 12 lessons, at weekly intervals wherever possible, set me on the right path. After that, a lesson now and then was all I needed and could manage with my tight work schedule. I think you will find, as I did, that once one has started one wants to take a lesson as often as possible, for the sheer physical well-being it gives one.

The basic objective, of course, is to learn how to use your breath economically, by taking it in with one brief and noiseless inspiration and then expending it so gently and slowly that the flame of a candle set a few inches away from your face will not even flicker. In one split second you ventilate your lungs fully and breath out little by little as you talk. For this, as all performers of Yoga know, you must use your stomach muscles and not your chest, in order to support the diaphragm. When you read in 19<sup>th</sup> Century novels "Her bosom rose and fell with the exertion of running up the garden path", it is because the heroine, poor thing, simply didn't know how to do it properly. (And in any case no author would write "Her tummy rose and fell etc.", not even in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century). Incidentally I am told that more men than women use their abdominal muscles naturally for breathing.

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, I know Dame AllC frowns upon relay. But let me ask this: How many of us know Danish, Dutch, and Arabic in addition to Italian and Chinese?

Here are three simple exercises which are extremely helpful in order to learn to breathe correctly.

1. Lie on your back on the floor Place one hand on your abdomen. Breathe in quickly and deeply and feel it rise as you do so Your chest should not move. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then breathe out slowly, making a hissing noise through your teeth, till your lungs are absolutely empty Feel your abdomen sink as you do this. Concentrate on what you are doing all the time. You should also do this exercise in bed every night, concentrating on the breathing process. You will drop off to sleep very quickly and at the same time form the habit of correct respiration.

2. Same exercise as before, but with hands relaxed on the floor. As you inhale, pull your legs up, knees bent over chest. Clasp hands over knees and hug the latter to your chest as you exhale.

3. Same again, but raising your head from the floor as you bring your knees up Try to touch your knees with your head as you breathe out.

There are many other breathing exercises, of course, as well as many more for pitching the voice correctly. However, it is best for these to be tailored to the individual and that is why a teacher is necessary.

Once you have mastered the appropriate techniques to the point where they are practised unconsciously and automatically, you will soon notice that end-of-day fatigue is less marked, even if the delegates have "tired the sun with talking", all sports suddenly become easier and you simply never are out of breath, head colds also become less frequent and smokers' early morning coughing, though it does not always cease permanently, certainly is less hacking and painful. Last but not least, your listeners are treated to a smoother and mellower delivery, which is easier on their ears and may perhaps diminish their tiredness at the end of a long meeting.

Jean Tempini  
(Member of the Health Committee in 1975)