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Could the way you talk ruin your job chances?



by Kenya McCullum | March 29, 2012

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When we prepare for [job interviews](#), we generally think about what we're going to say, not how we're going

to say it. But if you have a speech pattern that a potential employer finds annoying, it won't matter what words are coming out of your mouth -- the speech pattern will overshadow all of your words and may take you out of the running for the job you want.

"This is something people doing interviews must be aware of. You want people to focus on what you're saying, and not how you're talking," said Diane Paul, Director Clinical Issues in Speech-Language Pathology at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). "If there's anything that you're doing that might distract from the content of your message -- and put the focus more on the form or the way you're saying it -- that's something you want to be mindful of and try to change."

Potentially problematic speech patterns

Vocal fry. You may not know what it's called, but chances are, you've heard it. Also known as a creaky voice, vocal fry occurs when speakers use the lower part of their voice's register, often at the end of their sentences, which creates a guttural vibration in the vocal chords. Popular among celebrities like Kim Kardashian, Britney Spears and Zooey Deschanel, this language pattern has been embraced by many young women -- and identified as an annoyance by some listeners.

Although many speakers who use vocal fry believe that it has social benefits -- such as making them sound more sophisticated and identifying them as part of an in-group -- it can make finding a job more difficult.

"This could be a serious problem because it impacts an employer, especially when an employee uses it when talking to a customer or potential customer," said Katie Schwartz, Owner of Business Speech Improvement -- a company that helps corporate employees enhance their [communication skills](#). "People are turned off by hearing it, and since the employee is the voice of an organization, the customer may think the business is not professional and does not provide quality service."

Uptalk. Uptalk occurs when speakers raise the intonation of their voice at the end of every sentence -- making it sound like every statement they make is actually a question. "This can be perceived in a negative way because it tends to create the impression that you're not authoritative and you're unsure about what you're saying," said Paul.

Too high or too soft. Similar to the use of uptalk, when your voice is too high or too soft when you speak, it can create the impression that you don't have confidence in what you're saying. In addition, speaking this way can be highly distracting to an interviewer -- which is a sure way to shift the focus away from your actual message.

Speedy speech. If you speak too quickly during a job interview -- perhaps because of nervousness -- an interviewer may be left wondering what's your hurry. Also, by speaking this way, you can unintentionally communicate to a potential employer that you perform your job duties in the same hurried way -- and that you're not concerned enough to take your time and avoid mistakes.

Interjections. Young people are well-known for using the word "like" in their speech -- like way too much to like understand what they're like trying to say. The excessive use of "like," as well as "so," "um," and "you know," often acts as placeholders in a conversation, alerting the other speaker that you haven't given up your speaking turn and need a little bit of time to think of what you want to say next. Although they have a purpose, using these interjections can make speakers sound as if they have not prepared for their interview.

Slang. When speaking to members of your own peer group, slang acts as a common code that makes

communicating easier because you don't have to constantly explain what you mean. Chances are, however, in the workplace, your colleagues will not all be part of your peer group, so you must be able to show a [hiring manager](#) that you can communicate in a way that everyone in the office understands.

Beating bad speech [habits](#)

Your friends and family members may not judge you for your speaking patterns, but potential employers won't be so forgiving. That's why code switching -- or changing the way you speak based on the social situation you're in -- is the best way to ensure that your speech patterns won't turn off a hiring manager.

But sometimes this is a lot easier said than done. If code switching is not easy for you to achieve, the following tips can help you improve the way you speak before your job interview.

Roll the tape. The first step in correcting a speech problem is to identify what the problem is. By videotaping or audiotaping yourself in a practice interview, you can see what your weaknesses are and note the things that you need to correct.

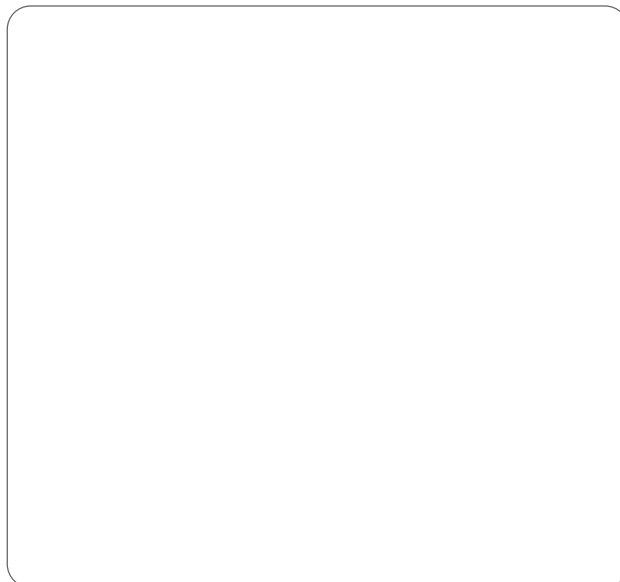
Practice, practice, practice. It's not just the way to Carnegie Hall: By working on your speech issues on a regular basis, you will find that code switching will become a lot easier and you can change the way you speak whenever you need to.

Thinking makes it so. Sometimes correcting speech problems can be all in your mind. For example, if you want to correct vocal fry, focusing your thoughts to the area behind your nose can keep the pitch of your voice from falling into those low, guttural tones. Also, slowing down the rate of your speech, and giving yourself time to really think about what you want to say, can reduce the use of slang.

A flick of the wrist. If you want to try a form of aversion therapy, put a rubber band around your wrist and gently flick it when you hear yourself using the speech pattern you want to correct. Eventually, you will be able to avoid that way of speaking -- and the rubber band punishment.

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