

## A word to the wise

How to win friends and influence people with your voice. **Owen Thomson** reports.

I've never thought of myself as having a power voice. Sure, as a child I was constantly berated for being painfully louder than all the other children, for having a voluble delivery that orbiting shuttle astronauts would be hard pressed to miss. But having vocal characteristics with the power to influence?

"I think the words that describe it are deep, authoritative, resonant, upfront, clear, bright, easy, relaxed, also with a warm friendly inviting energy," says voice expert Michael Kelly after assessing my tones over the phone for less than 30 seconds. "When you rang it sounded like this great financial planner I know who makes millions of dollars for his clients. He establishes rapport with his voice and people feel comfortable giving him millions of dollars to invest."

Kelly is director of Kelly Speech Communication, a Sydney company that helps people understand their voice and modify their vocal presentation in order to achieve desired work-oriented outcomes.

"A lot of decisions in workplaces get made in meetings and if your voice doesn't have the cut-through, you won't get listened to," Kelly says. "In meetings there's a lot of back and forth and you have to be able to break through the chatter and put your point across succinctly."

The first order of business, it seems, is to crank up the volume.

"Get louder and be comfortable with staying louder," he says. "Some people will get there with their loudness and then automatically go back into their shell but they have to get out there. Most people in business and some leaders just don't command authority with their voice. Another big factor is to have a perceived authentic passion or energy in your voice. Energy is the



Say it loud . . . voice expert Michael Kelly. Photo: Rob Homer

key thing."

Pitch is also a key factor. Higher voices are associated with traits such as politeness and subordination, so it's the lower registers that are more likely to inspire others to follow you into the heat of battle. Or at least go along with your radical plans for staff canteen menu reforms.

"When you lower the pitch,

dominance increases markedly," Kelly says. "It's also important to build in variety and unpredictability into your voice, making sure not to always speak with the same speed, pitch and loudness. It'll entertain the ears of your listeners. A good voice can convey that you're someone to listen to."

With the fairer sex often coming

up short in the deep pitch department, Kelly says women can sometimes suffer when it comes to getting their contributions across in a group situation.

"This can definitely be an issue, particularly when they're in their 20s," he says. "A lot of women talk softly. They sit in non-powerful positions, they don't speak loudly and they're too polite, so by the time they have a comment the subject has passed. Women can build in lower pitches also, but they don't want to sound like a man. They want to make their voice more rounded."

David Sillitoe, branch manager of a property maintenance company in Canberra, can attest to the power of improved vocal delivery. Sillitoe, 28, worked with Kelly for 12 months to try to develop a more dynamic style.

"One of the things that stood out for me was that I didn't speak loudly enough or with enough 'oomph' to keep people interested," says Sillitoe, who describes his old natural speech tendencies as monotone and dreary. "That was a bit of an eye-opener – that when you actually do raise your levels of speech volume, it keeps people more interested in your conversations."

He admits the modification process initially felt strange but says the results are definitely noticeable.

"It certainly pushed the boundaries for an introvert, that's for sure," he says. "It's been quite a big change and a lot of friends and even work colleagues have noticed it, so it's been positive. Especially with my marketing as well, going in and keeping people interested in what I'm talking about with regards to our business, even motivating our people. Coming across with a booming, confident voice has changed people's perceptions of me and the business as well."