

**10 Secrets The Pros Use To Keep
Their Voice Healthy And Happy. . .
with your personal voice coach Joni Wilson**



*“There is a singer living in all of us longing to put down that wooden spoon, pick up a real microphone and take center stage!!” Who knows, maybe you will be the next **Kelly, Clay, or Carrie.***

One of the biggest fallacies of the human singing voice is that everyone who sings is born with a great voice. . . Well, nothing could be further from the truth! Sing or speaking, learning to play your vocal instrument takes skill, dedication and hard work!

Voice Reality Check

As any producer who has worked with both the famous and the NOT so famous quickly learns, most singers have a love-hate relationship with their voice. They love it when it's working for them, and they hate it, when for no reason, it decides to leave town right in the middle of their recording session. Or worse yet, on the night they have to sing “live” at the Grammy Awards in front of all their peers.

How can the voice be so good one day and so bad the next. Just when you think you have finally “got it”, the voice “blows out” and you are stuck with a “vocal flat tire.” At least it feels like one. I can honestly say that for most of my career as a professional singer, I have been there and done that. Over the years while bouncing from voice technique to voice technique trying to solve my own vocal problem, I have gathered together some of the “little tricks” used to keep the voice in line and working even when sniffing and coughing from a cold. I know they work because I have been teaching them to my professional clients who's livelihood is dependent on a good, strong voice.

I learned enough from Joni to protect and maintain my voice no matter what is going on in my world. Joni's technique is applicable, reliable and best of all, easy to do. The technique has never failed me, even through eighteen hour recording sessions that continue daily for weeks

Take The Speaker/Singer Voice Analysis Exam

Being unhappy with your voice is one thing, knowing *why* you are unhappy with it takes a bit of analysis. The best way to pin point what needs “fixing,” is to take this simple voice analysis exam.

There are 20 questions. Read each question carefully to see which ones relate to your voice. A simple yes or no answer will work just fine. There are no right or wrong answers, and no grade to strive for. Your reward at the end of this test is a better understanding of how you perceive and hear your own voice. Remember, how *we* hear our voice is not always the way *others* hear it! Pencils ready? Go...

Mark Yes or No to the Questions that Relate to Your Voice.

1. Does the sound of your voice played back on your answering machine make you cringe?
2. Do you find yourself short of breath when you talk on the telephone?
3. Do people have difficulty hearing you and constantly ask you to repeat yourself?
4. Does your voice tire at the end of the work ing day and sound raspy and weak?
5. Do you find yourself constantly clearing your throat with a vengeance?
6. After talking all day, does it feels as though there is a lump in your throat?
7. Do people constantly misunderstand you?
8. Does your voice have a nervous quiver and shake when you talk?
9. Does your voice feel weak when you try to loudly express yourself ?
10. Do you have frequent colds that always settle in the throat area?
11. Do you hear your voice as high pitched and irritating?
12. Do strangers on the telephone think you are a child? (That’s a little problem.)
13. Do strangers on the telephone think you are the opposite sex? (That’s a big problem.)
14. Does your throat feel rough and dry when you are speaking?
15. Do you hear your voice as “lifeless” and dull?
16. Does your voice quality sound weaker in the morning and seem to improve as the day goes on?
17. Are you a heavy breather?
18. When faced with a confronting situation does your voice feel tight and “squeezed” causing the pitch to go up?
19. Does your voice sound nasal and thin?
20. No major problems to “speak” of. You would simply like to improve the voice you have.

NOTE: After you have taken this test go to Joni’s web site at www.provoicecoach.com and click on the voice analysis test page to get Joni’s suggestions for “fixing” each problem you have with you voice

The Voice Is A Terrible Thing To Waste (Or Loose!)

“Oh no ,” Jamie moaned. “ It’s the day of my big keynote speech and I have NO VOICE... What do I do now ?”

There is a good chance that at some time in your speaking or singing career you too will come face to face with that dreaded menace called, “*Vocal Blowout*”. Known in some circles as a “*Vocal flat Tire*” this pesky problem usually shows up at the worst possible time. (Like the day before your first keynote address at the NSA Convention or on the day of your recording session.) Well don’t panic, just open up you vocal tool box, take out that old red pump and start pumping the life back into your voice. Just like the tires on your car, your voice thrives on the air (breath) you pump into it. The voice will also go flat without sufficient air to support it.

In my 16 years of training voices, (speakers, singers, teachers, lawyers, business executives etc.), it doesn’t seem to matter what their profession may be, I found that most vocal problems begin and end with the breath. Because the human voice is a wind instrument, it can not operate effectively with out a steady flow of air. Picture lottery balls spinning on top of a column of air. If someone turns off the air, the balls will all fall down, right? So goes the voice! Learning how to breath like a horn player who pumps a steady stream of air up the wind pipe, out the lips and into the horn, is also the key to good voice control and endurance This was a lesson I learned the hard way, because at the ripe old age of 22 while singing in Las Vegas, (trying to out-shout loud bands and crowd noises), I had the ultimate “*Vocal Blowout*” and lost my voice completely.

Fearing that my budding singing career was over before it had begun, I saw doctor after doctor, and the prognosis went from dismal to despair. Refusing to accept their echoing advise to; “Just get another career dear.”, I decided to go to the medical books and find out how this voice, that was ruining my career, actually worked. The more I read, the more I realized how amazing the vocal instrument was. First of all, it wasn’t as fragile as I thought., I just had to learn how to play it correctly instead of incorrectly, and second, I needed to totally reprogram my misguided beliefs about my voice. The end result of all this vocal “soul searching” was a stronger, more enduring voice for me and a wonderful gift to share with other voice users and abusers just like me.

Because this vocal instrument *is* the whole body not just the vocal cords, (throat area), it is subject to all of the events that go on in your life both emotional and physical. When the riggers of constant travel, stress, environmental conditions and just plain vocal fatigue get too heavy for them, those beautiful little vocal cords just get tired and will shut down. (Like Jamie’s did). The voice is like a good stereo system with a built in alarm system that shuts itself off before it can burn itself out. The voice will also try to shut down if pushed to hard to prevent further damage to the vocal cords. But if forced, the voice could be permanently damaged, resulting in a career change. As professionals, our voice *is* our career! Now here is the question... “How many of you have actually taken the time to learn how your voice works... HMMMMM?”

Most major voice problems can be avoided with good understanding, and a bit of loving care and always remember: *No “quick fix” is a substitute for good voice technique!!*

Solving 4 Major Problems That Affect The Voice

Here some of the voice problems speakers face daily. How do you handle them?

- **Head Colds and Sinus Infections.** (“That kid on the plane kept sneezing on me. . .”) Water magnifies sound. So when my clients have a major presentation and a head cold all at the same time, I tell them to enjoy the resonant sound. The voice is produced in the vocal cords down in the larynx/neck area. Nasal congestion is produced in the nose and sinus area. These two are not even close to each other. The major concern here is to be aware of the medication you take. If it dries up your mucous (as decongestants do), it will dry up your vocal cords because they are mucous membranes and need that mucous to lubricate them. Steaming the mucous membranes of the nose and throat with a few drops of eucalyptus oil (any health food store has it,) will work wonders. If you don’t have a steamer, simply boil a pan of water on the stove, drop in a few drops of the oil, place a towel over your head and breathe in the healing steam all the way down to the bottom of the lungs. If your in a hotel room, take a hot steamy shower and with your mouth wide open, breath that steam in and out.

- **Heartburn and Stomach Acid** (“Must have been that chicken surprise I ate.”) Stomach acid can move from the stomach up to the larynx and irritate your vocal cords. affecting your voice big time. Acid reflux is common in those who have stomach problems. Do not eat before a performance or presentation, and never swallow anything with caffeine, alcohol or citric acid in it. Warm herbal teas are soothing to the tummy and the voice. (Throat Coat is my favorite tea,)

- **Chronic Throat Clearing** (“If I could just clear it out....”) This is a very common problem for speakers. We have all sat in an audience listening to a speaker who constantly clears his/her throat. It not only irritates the audience but it is extremely irritating to the vocal cords. (This could be a nervous habit carried over from puberty.) Remember, the mucous that coats the vocal cords is there to protect them and when you continually scrape out the mucous to clear the throat, the body’s defense system calls up the “Mucous Army”. The more mucous you scrap, the more mucous the cords produce to protect themselves from all that scraping When the mucous army begins to resemble *The Gulf War*, it’s time to stop all that destructive clearing and try another tactic. Clearing the throat does NOT work! Small sips of water will put your Mucous Army “at ease.” Also dropping the jaw in a relaxed “Yawn” position will help relieve pressure in the vocal cords While in that yawn position say “Haaaaahhhh” sliding down your pitch . This is called a “yawn sigh” and it’s a great tension reliever.

- **PMS Blues** (“ PMS affects the voice? Your kidding me.”) Obviously this one only affects the ladies, but it’s a real problem for women who depend on a strong voice for business. It is not an imagined problem, guys! It’s so real that it’s even written in the opera diva’s contract that she will *not* perform while PMS-ing. It’s tastefully called “Grace Days”. This vocal problem is caused by the hormones getting out of balance and changing the natural size and texture of the vocal cords. This causes a weakness in the voice and a loss of high notes. For the female speaker the symptoms are: vocal fatigue, hoarseness and some muffling of the voice. Oh, where are those “Grace Days” when you need them?

6 Things to Do to Keep the Voice Happy

1. **DO** drink water to keep your vocal cords moist and hydrated. The vocal cords are surrounded by mucous and need that mucous to survive. Hydrating the cords with water will help them to stay healthy. Avoid anything that robs the cords of their mucous covering. Excessive air-conditioners and heating systems suck the moisture out of the air and also out of your vocal cords.
2. If you have to use your voice, **DO NOT** take any decongestants that dry up your mucous. You are far better off with a dripping nose than two shriveled up vocal cords.
3. **DO NOT** clear your throat with a vengeance. The more you clear out the mucous, the more mucous will come to replace it. Remember, it is a protective coating. If you must clear the throat, do it as gently as you can.
4. If you are going to use your voice **DO NOT** drink anything that dehydrates the cords such as caffeine, (coffee, tea, Coke etc.). On the other hand, avoid anything that creates excess mucous such as dairy (milk, ice cream, cheese), and acid fruit juices (orange, grapefruit). By the way, if you are speaking at a dinner or breakfast meeting, do not eat before you speak. Digesting food can interfere with your voice performance.
5. **DO** drink herbal teas and warm liquids before and during your talk. The cords are membranes and shrink with anything cold. NO ICE! Warmth keeps them plumped up and happy.
6. **DO NOT** whisper if your voice becomes tired and feels weak. Whispering causes more damage to the vocal cords than speaking in a normal voice.

Take the time to invest in your vocal image along with your wardrobe, head shots and media kits. Remember, “A Good Voice is Just Good Business.”

I came to the United States from Ireland a number of years ago as a guitar player who never sang a note. I decided what I really wanted was to do a CD of my own original songs even though my voice was weak and my pitch was bad. After two years of voice classes I was still an incompetent singer. The co-producer of my CD suggested I work with Joni. After only two lessons I noticed a big difference. She immediately told me my problems and how to fix them. Back in the studio, my producer was amazed at the difference. I would recommend Joni to any style of singer at any level.

Jessica Morrison Singer/songwriter/ recording artist

Joni Wilson is a top voice coach, best selling author of the 3-Dimensional Voice, the 3-Dimensional Business Voice and the Wilson voice Series. She is a professional speaker, corporate presentation coach and co-owner of Productions 4U, a company specializing in convention entertainment. As a professional singer Joni has worked the top hotels in the country, appeared on TV with Regis, opened for Elvis, sings with a 17 piece big band and is currently recording her 2nd CD, a tribute to female Jazz singers of the 40's and 50's. Joni offers on line voice lesson at www.virtualvoicecoach.com.