



Be a Voiceover Voyeur. It's Less Creepy Than it Sounds **By Gabrielle Nistico**

So here's something you don't hear very often in voiceover...talk less.

When you were a kid you probably remember being told "You have two ears and one mouth, which means you should listen twice as much as you speak!" If you're a parent, you've probably even doled out this piece of advice to your own kids. And if you are like the typical voiceover actor, you were also a precocious, talkative kid who probably got in trouble for yakking all the time.

I still have the report card from 1st grade with my teacher's note to my parents in the margin, "Gabrielle is a very bright girl however she frequently talks too much and can be disruptive to the class." You too huh? Yup, born to talk. But have you been talking for so long...that you've forgotten how to listen?

A Voiceover actor's job is all about recreating natural human thoughts, emotions, behaviors and of course speech patterns. We owe it to ourselves to really pay attention to the trends that effect how people communicate. Language, expressions and mannerisms change from generation to generation and are altered and affected by social changes too. Even body language can be 'trendy'; don't think so...? Hipsters. Enough said.

We can see many of the trends that effect advertising and commercial voiceovers simply by observing what is taking place in real life. The Glottal Fry that the Kardashians made popular has invaded the speech patterns of girls and young women all across the nation. The ultra wry delivery of actors like Ellen Page, Jesse Eisenberg and the entire cast of The Twilight Saga have influenced hundreds of thousands of 20-somethings. Not to mention the inevitable changes and influences from music. Hip-hop, Emo, DubStep, and countless counter-culture genres are impacting people every day, the very people your voiceover clients are trying to reach.

So what is a voiceover actor to do? You don't necessarily have to like the trends, but you do need to understand them. You must become a student of modern communication – a voiceover voyeur – who takes the time to really listen to *how* conversations are taking place. It's a pretty big challenge to sound conversational and 'be real' on mic if we don't know / understand the current influences on the English language.

The changes from one generation to the next might really surprise you but you'll be a more well-rounded actor for your efforts. And since most voiceover actors don't sound their age, (most of us sound younger than we really are) you can extend the life of your career even further, simply by being 'more with it'.

A lot of voiceover actors struggle with being more conversational and sounding more real in order to meet the demands of today's clients. Ask yourself, "How familiar am I with today's language and speech trends? Do I have a good understanding of how other generations think and what motivates them?" If you answer no you should really consider taking a front row seat in the observation theater known as life. Shopping malls, airports, amusement parks, even some restaurants give you an all access pass to hear how people are speaking today. Forget going to the zoo to watch the animals – you're interested in watching humans while they watch the animals!

What exactly are you looking to glean as you tactfully spy on others? A person's choice of words, the way they say them, their body language, tone, volume, pace, you name it. The more you see: friends interact, modern parents with their kids, couples both fighting and showing affection, the better you'll be at translating this information into conversational reads that sound organic to today's audience.

And don't forget the noises! Oh the noises people make when they think no one is watching! No I'm not being crude (but if you know me, I can understand how you'd make that assumption ☺). Before actual words, cave people used a series of universal sounds (many of which are still used today) to communicate how they felt. Across the globe people sigh, yawn, giggle, groan & moan to communicate things we *all* understand. What noises do you make in casual conversation to better help illustrate your state of being? Create a mental catalog of noises that you hear during your observations. These noises could very well be the needed adlibs that take your reads from ordinary to extraordinary! And the effects of the technique are almost subliminal. You'll start hearing your clients say things like, "Your auditions really stood out to us as being the most natural and authentic!"

Try to spend at least an hour a week (perhaps on your lunch break) eavesdropping on others. When we stop talking for a little while and start listening; really hearing what is going on around us in everyday conversation, your reads improve vastly and your ability to help make a client's script conversant (even when it isn't) will make you look like the King (or Queen) of Conversational.

For more on this topic attend Gabby's VOICE 2014 workshop – How to be Conversation & Spontaneous In An Announcer Copy World. Gabrielle Nistico is a voiceover actress, the Business First voiceover coach, an author and a career kick starter who has helped hundreds of voiceover actors find their voice and improve their careers. Learn more about her at www.GabrielleNistico.com and check out her newest endeavor www.VOPrep.com

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