

## I Sound So Boring!

### **Objectives:**

Though you might think that some people were born boring, the truth is that they just never learned certain speech habits that most of us pick up naturally. Training in simple techniques of vocal variety usually does the trick in eliminating tiresome speeches. Vocal variety is the skill of emphasizing certain words to convey meaning and emotion so that those words "jump out" at the listener. It is the vocal equivalent of a colorful gesture. The following tips will pull you--and the audience--out of the doldrums.

### **Exercises:**

1. **Pitch change.** Change your pitch (usually upward) on an important word or syllable. Practice these sentences with a higher pitch on the word indicated, noticing that you have the power to change meaning as you change pitch:

"She's wearing a **RED** dress" (not green).

"**SHE'S** wearing a red dress." (*That* woman is.)

"She's **WEARING** a red dress" (as opposed to carrying or eating it).

Tape record yourself and listen to make sure that the meaning really does stand out.

2. **Volume change.** Go louder on your most important word. You may feel as if you're shouting but trust me, it's just that you're not used to adding that extra *oomph*. Or, for the "Mr. Rogers" approach, go softer.

Practice with this sentence:

"A **LONG** journey begins with a single step."

3. **Length change.** Admittedly a hammy technique. Ed McMahon has made millions introducing Mr. Carson with an extra long "Heeeeere's ...". Lengthen the vowel of a word to signal great interest or drama. For example:

"I dooon't see the point."

"He's aaabsolutely out of his mind."

"Brides don't need to wear long dresses."

To practice vocal variety, pick a paragraph each day from the newspaper or a magazine. Underline the important words in every sentence. Be generous with yourself--don't try to become overly exciting suddenly. Tape-record yourself as you read the paragraph aloud and play it back to see if you actually "hit" the words you targeted.