

Accept Imitations: A Beginner's Guide to Impressions

Chapter Two: Knowing Your Own Voice

By Jim Meskimen

If you were a Las Vegas building contractor, and someone hired you to put up a huge hotel/casino in a specific location, and you accepted a lot of money upfront and got workers on the site with all the materials without ever bothering to find out if the building site was on a mountain, a desert or in a swamp. you would shortly find yourself immersed in slowly drying concrete as part of a highway overpass.

That is NOT the way to attract the opposite sex.

Which, we recall from all the anthropological data that we so wisely skipped in the introduction to this book, has everything to do with why grown men imitate things.

To review—HUNTERS.

So, we would be guilty of the same error if we began to imitate things, willy-nilly, or Milli Vanilli, without first getting very familiar with the lay of the land, I.E. our OWN voice.

How DO we sound?

You may recall that when you FIRST heard a recording of your own voice, the experience was an unpleasant one. This, as far as I can tell, is universal. Anyone who says they loved the sound of their own recorded voice the first time they heard it is lying and should not be allowed to drive you anywhere in an automobile.

The reason, I believe, that hearing one's own voice, particularly for the first time, thru the apparatus of a recording machine is so shockingly disagreeable is because we never hear our voices that way; we hear a much fuller, much more expressive and tonally rich sound, through both the vibration of the air outside our bodies, and from the vibration of our bodies themselves.

The recording just peels off the thinnest sound waves off out of the air and totally ignores all the more robust, deeper waves that make you sound sexy and irresistible.

When I first heard my voice on my father's old reel to reel mini-recorder (and I can pinpoint that upsetting memory to the day, hour and place) it was as if some awful sorcerer had set up a ghastly puppet to taunt me, a little boy, with vengeful malice, by imitating in a thin, weedy and insubstantial mockery my own, euphonious voice.

Years later, I took a tape player and pulled the same exact stunt on my own daughter.

Are all men devils? Shut UP.

So, as performers, one thing we really need to work through is the awful reality of our own voice as it sounds to others. And luckily, it's not that hard to do.

You simply have to record yourself a lot and listen until you no longer break out in hives, or want to jump out a window.

How long will that take? I don't know. Hours? Days? I just told you I DON'T KNOW.

But I do recommend you get on it right away. It's actually important. That's why it's part of Chapter Two, not Chapter 66.

(By the way, there IS no Chapter 66. This isn't an eBook on How to Understand Women, this is Accept Imitations, the Guide to Doing Celebrity Impressions for Beginners.)

Now, If you have an iPhone or any kind of recorder that you can hold in your hand, make it your business as soon as possible to record yourself talking to others. You don't need to tell them you are doing it, just make sure you destroy the recordings before they fall into the wrong hands.

At first, you will be self conscious and, like a sixth grader who knows he is being watched by his babysitter as he pretends to do his homework, until she leaves the room and he can get back to World of Warcraft, you will not speak naturally. Your voice will be "on its best behavior" and you will be "a phony sounding person" and a "weirdo" and your companions will say, "What the hell is the matter with you, you sound like a bad actor! Are you recording us? You better destroy those recordings before they fall into the wrong hands!"

And then you will have fewer friends, again VIOLATING all the social/psychological reasons for doing impressions that we wisely avoided addressing earlier.

Simply record yourself and then listen to the whole thing from start to finish. You may NOT fast forward or Scrub forward or stop until it's done.

At the end of that horrible experience, you will either feel older, younger, or about the same. If you feel older or younger, start from the beginning and do it again. If you feel about the same, then sober up and try it again.

Again, once you have heard the whole recording for a second time, judge your reaction. Are you considering a vow of silence? A career as an underground explosives expert? A camp counsellor for the deaf?

If you answered any of the above, YES, then go back and listen to the whole thing again, and again and again until you no longer have a reaction of any kind and can be comfortably familiar with how you sound.

Like I say, this can take hours. Or days. Or possibly longer.

There is an ancient story that Native Americans tell about the owl, much revered in their culture. His continual lament of “WHO?” they claim, comes from a time in the incredibly distant past when the very first owl heard his voice on a Sony answering machine, and demanded to know the true owner of that voice. All these many centuries later, the owl, much revered by Native Americans, still demands to know “WHO?”

He clearly needs to record and listen to his own voice more, if he is ever going to become revered for his celebrity impressions by the Native Americans, as well as his keen eyes and appetite for rodents.

The End