

Finding your lawyerly voice

Voice coach Lucy Cornell has been helping lawyers and barristers talk their talk – and be comfortable doing it. She tells **Justin Whealing** why a healthy mind and body can be heard through your voice

We have all had those moments when the impact you hoped for with a certain phrase or comment in a meeting was not translated in its proper context.

Lucy Cornell's job is to make sure that doesn't happen again and hinder your career.

Cornell, a director of Voice Coach, aims to "free up your voice" from "repressive, civilizing habits". She notes that for law firms, which are so dependent on relationships from both an internal perspective and with regard to client interaction, the ability to communicate confidently is related to performance and career progression.

Last week she visited Gilbert + Tobin and spoke to a group of lawyers below partner level in the firm's Sydney office.

The message she was trying to convey was that lawyers can empower themselves through speech.

"When moving up the rungs of the ladder, such as the senior associate level and the next level beyond that, that is really when you need to start being able to communicate," she said. "It is all about relationships and the influencing capacity, and those skills aren't really developed. It is a real area of need, particularly for women."

Cornell has a high-profile client list that includes Volvo, Macquarie Bank, Ernst & Young and Cricket Australia.

She has also worked with a number of other law firms, including Freehills, Mallesons Stephen Jaques and Sparke Helmore.

At Sparkes, Cornell spoke to around 40 female lawyers as part of the firm's Women's Network. She says that law firms are becoming increasingly aware about the need to provide career advancement style courses for its female staff.

"There is a big movement at the moment, particularly over the last six months, about women and voice and how women can claim their voice more effectively," she said.

Meditating barristers

Cornell has also worked extensively with barristers and legal associations, including the Victorian Bar and the Australian Bar Association. Internationally, she has worked with the South African Bar and with around 60 barristers in the UK as part of an advocacy course run by Keble College at the University of Oxford.

With all of her clients – from within and outside the legal profession – she encourages a whole-of-body approach.

"Your voice is a function of your entire being," she said. "It is an energetic expression of you that comes through your body and your presence. What's your body doing to disarm you from being connected with someone?"



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LUCY CORNELL, DIRECTOR, VOICE COACH

To encourage clients to feel relaxed and calm when speaking, and to connect with themselves, Cornell incorporates yoga, breathing exercises and meditation into her speech training. She believes relaxation techniques influence communication styles and how people interact with each other.

"I now have barristers who meditate before going to court when that would have never happened five years ago," she said.

In order to help clients feel comfortable with their voice, Cornell is careful to ensure that the lessons she imparts incorporate the natural tones and timbre of each individual.

She believes it is counter-productive to adopt a voice that sounds forced.

"I try and impart the notion of finding a tone of authority through authenticity," she said. "How much of a voice do you have, and what does your literal voice sound like?"

By adopting such an approach, Cornell is then able to talk to clients about the particular issues they have with their voice (do I sound overbearing or aggressive when trying to be assertive?), and to link their voice with the emotion they are attempting to convey.

"When I hear people tell me that when they try to express something emotionally, and they are told there is no place for that in the workplace, it drives me mental," she said.

"The voice is an expression of your intellect and emotion." **LW**