

Dysphonia and that 4 lettered word.... 'WORK'

One of the biggest challenges faced by many of us who are living with dysphonia is how to manage at work. As if our social life is not tricky enough ... work brings a whole new set of problems and, after all, everyone needs an income.

It's not only the practical issues, but there is the self talk.... that sneaky voice that erodes your last shreds of confidence:

- 'no-one understands me'
- 'people won't take me seriously'
- 'who would want to employ someone that sounds like me?'
- 'I'll never get that promotion'

But, for some people... their voice IS their career, so vocal changes or loss of voice can lead to unemployment, loss of confidence and ultimately depression.

The impact of a voice disorder on work, can range from a mild inconvenience, through to devastating unemployment. There are a few ways to approach this....

- **Stay put in your current job**
- **Look for a low vocal demand job**
- **Seek vocational advice or assistance**

Staying Put

Dysphonia doesn't mean you need to give up your job, but it may mean you need to consider daily vocal demands, expectations, and any modifications you can make.

While you should not feel obligated to disclose your vocal condition, sometimes it is helpful for others to be aware of your limitations. But if you sense that your voice is impacting on your ability to perform your role properly, it may be wise to set up a meeting with your manager and discuss this. Be prepared, think what you want from the meeting, and offer some possible solutions eg, less phone use and more email, face to face meetings rather than teleconference, regular scheduled 'quiet time' (vocal rest), use of a personal amplifier etc. You may be surprised at their willingness to accommodate your needs, but try to approach the discussion in a positive and solution focussed way, highlighting how you can work together so that you can remain a valuable employee.

It may also be a time to look out for other opportunities within your organisation, and the possibility of moving sideways (or up) to a position with less vocal demand.

If you work in a large organisation, you may find that your staff health, human resources or Employee Assistance Program can offer confidential support to assess your needs, without impacting on your job.

Looking for a lower vocal demand job.

This option is often one contemplated by teachers, performers and for others who rely on 'voice' as the primary tool of their trade.

Other fields with lower vocal demands, but using teaching skills include:

- Librarian (school or community)
- Distance Education Teaching (online)
- Proofreading, editing, copyediting.
- Examination Marker /Supervisor
- Grant-writing
- Program Development
- Teaching within the deaf community – would require competence in sign language.

Lower voice demand jobs more generally ... to get you thinking

- Computer Programming
- Medical or Legal billing services
- Word-processing
- Court Reporter/Stenographer
- Data entry and/or Data analysis
- Paralegal (in an environment focused on legal research/writing)
- Working in a Library
- Writing
- Bookkeeping
- Accounting
- Web design
- Graphic Design
- Archivist
- Art Restoration
- Artist
- Researcher / research assistant
- Lab Technician
- Chef/Cook/Food Service
- Gardening
- Florist
- Dressmaker
- Researching/Research Assistant
- Pet Groomer
- Courier / Driver
- Work for yourself – start that business you always dreamed of

Seeking vocational advice or assistance

Depending on your individual condition and circumstances, you **may** be eligible for some assistance from the Government. This may include referral to disabilities employment service or Vocational Rehabilitation Service who can assist with assessing individual needs and finding a job that accommodates your challenges.

If you need help, don't be shy to ask for it. ... from your manager, employer, local doctor, counsellor or disabilities service.

Don't forget you can post questions on various discussion forums including:

- Dysphonia lets talk about it – facebook
- Australian Dysphonia Network – facebook

And there is always study as the National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association suggests..

'study medicine and find a cure for all forms of dysphonia'