



Voice and Elite Sports Coaches

Coaches depend heavily on their voices at work. From commanding training drills to conducting meetings, they rely on their voices to successfully communicate. Because of this, occupational voice use and vocal health are important considerations for coaches.

Research into other occupations (e.g. teachers and performers) suggests that when workers rely heavily on their voices across the working day:

- They are more likely to experience vocal health problems
- Vocal health problems may impact on work performance

Research into Voice Use in Football Coaches

In 2009, a project was conducted by LaTrobe University to explore how elite football coaches used their voices at work. 12 coaches participated, who worked across a number of roles within 4 football clubs.

Each coach:

- Had their voice computer analysed during a typical training session
- Reported their experiences of voice symptoms (e.g. dry throat, feeling hoarse) over both the current season and their coaching career
- Participated in an interview to discuss how they used their voice at work, what impacted on their voice and their experiences of vocal health

What the Research Found

This research confirmed that coaches use their voices:

- Across many environments (often contending with background noise, weather and distance)
- At louder volumes than normal conversation
- For extended periods of time

Computer analysis showed that coaches typically used their voices more than 20 dB louder than an everyday conversation. In some circumstances, this was over 40 dB louder. This louder volume occurred both indoors (meetings and indoor training) and when outside. Coaches also used their voices around 20% of the time across training environments. This is comparable to other occupations that rely on their voice throughout the day (such as preschool teachers – 17%). This amount of voice use is considerably more than many other occupations, such as nursing and speech pathology (which range from 5-7%).

Coaches suggested that they did not experience voice symptoms every time they used their voices. However, all coaches experienced some degree of voice symptoms at least some of the time.

During the interviews, coaches reflected on the high level of verbal communication they undertake to do their jobs. Because of this, they felt voice is a 'tool of the trade' for being able to coach successfully.

Coaches also suggested that:

- Past negative experiences shaped what they now did (e.g. if yelling at players continuously had hurt, coaches may now avoid excessive yelling).
- Strategies such as drinking fluids, taking a break from talking and using a whistle helped their voices (but were often done out of habit, not to consciously help their voices).
- As players, some had considered their throat 'feeling tired' or 'hurting' as a positive reflection on the amount of talking they had done.
- There were times when they noticed that their voice did not feel 'quite right' or took more effort to use. However, no coaches sought help from health care professionals (e.g. GP's or Speech Pathologists) for their voices.

Coaches also highlighted that workplace environments impacted on how frequently they spoke, their vocal volume and effort required to use their voices. Background noise, reverberation (such as in gyms and sprung floors), weather, wind and player distances all impacted on how coaches used their voices.

Coaches suggested that most of what they did with their voices was geared to player outcomes. They were more likely to consider how to get reactions out of particular players than their own vocal health.

What Does this Mean for Coaches?

This research showed that coaches are heavily reliant on their voices for success in their jobs. Despite not having considered their voices at work before, coaches were able to reflect on many aspects of their voice use. This included what impacted on their voices and what they found helpful to alleviate voice symptoms. However, they were generally unaware of why these strategies worked. They also did not know how to prevent voice problems from developing.

With greater knowledge about what impacts on their voices and how to use them effectively, there is good potential for coaches to improve their vocal health.