

THE BIG IDEA

Most people think communication is about what they say. Dr. Brenda Buckley-Hughes has spent a career proving it is about what your **listener actually receives**. The voice tools of Pitch, Pause, and Pace are not performance tricks, they are the delivery system that either opens or closes the door between you and the person across from you. Get these three right and every other skill you have finally lands.

THE GOLDEN RULE

It's not about you. It has never been about you.

The moment you shift focus from the impression you are making to the need your listener has, fear shrinks and connection grows. Every technique in this framework only works when it is pointed at the person across from you, not the mirror inside your own head.

LEVEL 1 : THE FOUNDATION	LEVEL 2 : THE EXECUTION
GIFT VS. SKILL Communication is both a natural gift and a learnable skill. Like piano, practice makes any player more powerful regardless of where they started.	PITCH The conscious variation of your vocal notes. Most people use only two or three of the eight to ten available levels, leaving the rest of their impact on the table.
HABITUAL VS. OPTIMUM Your habitual pitch is where your voice lives by default. Your optimum pitch is where it is strongest and most credible. They are rarely the same place.	PAUSE The intentional silence before or between thoughts. It is not dead air. It is an exclamation mark your audience actually hears, even though no sound is made.
SPEAKER VS. AUDIENCE The fatal communication error is centering yourself in the message. Effective communicators flip that script and make the listener the center of every decision.	PACE The speed at which ideas travel from your mouth to their ears. Too fast creates obstacles; too slow loses momentum. Variation is the secret, not a single setting.

■ HABIT DEEP DIVES: THE ELITE APPLICATION

01 PITCH: YOUR VOICE HAS MORE NOTES

Pitch is not about sounding dramatic. It is about using the natural range your voice already has. Most professionals lock into one or two notes out of habit, which makes them sound flat, uncertain, or bored, even when they are not. Varying your pitch tells the listener: this part matters more than that part. It is the difference between speaking and communicating.

ELITE MOVE:

Pay attention to where your voice goes at the END of a statement. When your pitch drops, you signal confidence and finality. When it rises, you can sound like everything is a question. Record a 30-second voicemail to yourself and listen back. Where is your pitch landing on key points? Practice lowering it on your most important statements.

"Let me be clear about one thing, and I want you to hear this."

02 PAUSE: THE SILENCE THAT LANDS

A pause is not forgetting your place. It is an exclamation mark the audience can feel but never hears out loud. The silence after a big idea gives your listener a moment to catch up, to feel the weight of what you just said, and to prepare to engage. Most people rush past the pause because it feels uncomfortable to them, but research shows the listener barely notices the length. What they do notice is the statement that follows it.

ELITE MOVE:

Before your next important meeting, identify the single most important statement you need your listener to walk away with. Write the word STOP in your notes directly after it. When you arrive at that moment in the conversation, finish the sentence, close your mouth completely, and count to two before continuing. Do not fill the silence with 'um' or 'so.' Just let it land.

"And the reason I say that is this... [silence] ...because it changes everything that comes next."

03 PACE: FAST DOES NOT MEAN SMART

Rushing through a presentation does not mean you are confident. It usually means you are nervous. When you speed up, you create an obstacle your listener has to trip over, and by the time they recover, they have missed your next point too. Pace is a gift you give your audience. Vary it intentionally: move faster through familiar ground and slow down when the idea is new, complex, or worth emphasizing.

ELITE MOVE:

The next time you feel yourself speeding up, use it as a signal rather than a flaw. Recognize that the acceleration is anxiety, not urgency. Slow down by extending the natural breath between thoughts rather than between words. Practice a key section of your next presentation at half speed first, then at normal speed, then again. The variation will become instinct faster than you think.

"I know you want this fast. But what you actually need is to get it. So let me slow down right here for you."

3 ACTION ITEMS

1 Record Your Next Pitch

Use your phone to record a 60-second summary of anything you are currently selling or presenting. Play it back and count how many pitch levels you actually use.

2 Build In One Deliberate Pause

Before your next meeting or call, identify one key statement you want to land and write the word PAUSE after it in your notes. Then actually stop for two full seconds before continuing

3 Do an Audience Analysis First

Before your next presentation, answer three questions in writing: Who is my audience, what do they need from me, and why am I speaking to them specifically? Your prep starts there, not with your slide deck.



You can have all the content in the world and sound like an encyclopedia, or you can be all wonderfully bubbly and delightful and have no content. It shouldn't be one or the other — **it needs to be both.**

Dr. Brenda Buckley-Hughes



CARRY FORWARD QUESTIONS

1. Before I open my mouth, do I know what this person actually needs from me right now?
2. Am I varying my pitch, pausing with intention, and pacing for their comprehension, or just for my own comfort?

■ BONUS DEEP DIVE • THE SCIENCE OF VOCAL VARIATION

Dr. Buckley-Hughes mentioned that most speakers rely on only two or three of the eight to ten pitch levels available to the human voice. This idea, that vocal monotony actively undermines credibility and comprehension, is well supported in the communication and cognitive science literature. Here is what the research actually says about what she taught.

1 Vocal Variety and Perceived Credibility: A study published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology found that speakers with greater prosodic variation (pitch, rate, and loudness shifts) were rated significantly higher on both competence and trustworthiness than monotone speakers. Monotony signals disengagement and low confidence to listeners regardless of content quality.

[View Source →](#)

2 Pausing and Cognitive Load. Research from the Journal of Voice demonstrated that strategic pausing reduces listener cognitive load by giving the audience time to process incoming information. Speakers who paused appropriately after key points were rated as clearer and more persuasive than those who spoke continuously, even when content was identical

[View Source →](#)

3 Speech Rate and Information Retention: Research published in the Journal of Speech and Hearing Research tested comprehension at slow rates (110-130 wpm) versus fast rates (190-210 wpm) and found that fast speech consistently reduced retention of key details, even when main ideas survived. Speakers who pushed past a comfortable pace for the listener sacrificed the nuance and specifics that make a message actually stick.

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■ ADDITIONAL READING

Want to go deeper? These peer-reviewed studies explore the science behind pitch, pause, pace, and the fear that keeps most speakers stuck.

4 PITCH + PERSUASION | *Speech Rate, Intonation, and Pitch: Investigating the Bias and Cue Effects of Vocal Confidence on Persuasion. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin.* [View Source →](#)

5 PITCH + TRUST | *How Do Voice Acoustics Affect the Perceived Trustworthiness of a Speaker? A Systematic Review. Frontiers in Psychology.* [View Source →](#)

6 PAUSE + PROCESSING | *Strategic Pauses Relieve Listeners from the Effort of Listening to Fast Speech. Trends in Hearing.* [View Source →](#)

7 SPEAKING ANXIETY | *Psychological Interventions for the Fear of Public Speaking: A Meta-Analysis. Frontiers in Psychiatry.* [View Source →](#)

8 VOCAL CREDIBILITY | *How Does a Credible Voice Sound?. Journal of the Acoustical Society of America.* [View Source →](#)

FEATURED GUEST

Dr. Brenda Buckley-Hughes

Ed.D. | Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs, Judson University | Author | Communication Scholar

Dr. Brenda Buckley-Hughes has spent more than 30 years teaching oral communication at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. She holds an Ed.D. from the University of Tennessee and is the author of *Introductory Speech Communication: Overcoming Obstacles, Reaching Goals*, a textbook used in college speech courses nationwide. As a professor of Communication Arts and a director of doctoral programs at Judson University, her research spans public speaking, fluency, readers' theatre, and communication in worship. She is Bryan Buckley's sister and the person who modeled audience-first communication long before he had a name for it.

CONNECT WITH DR. BUCKLEY-HUGHES

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BY BRYAN BUCKLEY

THE 1ST 5 MINUTES

Everything Dr. Buckley-Hughes taught in this episode comes down to one idea: *it is not about you, it is about them*. That is the same principle at the core of The 1st 5 Minutes. Bryan Buckley's framework gives you a repeatable system for making the person across from you feel seen, heard, and valued before you ever get to your pitch. Read this book and the three P's finally have somewhere to land.

Get the Book → bryanbuckleyspeaks.com



TURN YOUR 1ST 5 MINUTES INTO YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE — LEVERAGE OR LOSE IT.

Bryan Buckley is the leading authority on the 1st 5 Minutes of a business conversation — 5X author, speaker, corporate trainer, and podcast host. He helps sales professionals and leaders develop, deepen, and master their business communication skills so every conversation counts.

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BOOK A 30-MIN CALL →