



Talent at Work

Von Rohr & Associates S.A.

Career Life-Cycle Management®

Editorial by Eva von Rohr

October 2009

Von Rohr & Associates: teamwork as a priority.

Over this period, an especially turbulent one for many companies, and one in which career changes are ever more complex and difficult to master, the honing of personal skills and talents is becoming an increasingly important issue for all of our candidates.

In order to supply them with the most effective tools to leverage opportunities stemming from career cycle changes with which they are confronted, we never hesitate to call upon external expertise, while always maintaining as a priority both the excellence and the personalization of services provided. At Von Rohr & Associates, our approach is based on true teamwork. We seek the ideal association of experts within our consultancy and beyond, with the sole purpose of providing the best combination of services, tailored to each situation.

Throughout the counseling process, the Von Rohr coaches may integrate external consultants who possess specialized and complementary knowledge which can be of great assistance in finding innovative solutions, in providing training or in furnishing advice in a specific field. In fine, the purpose is always to enhance effectiveness in terms of positioning or repositioning candidates on the job market, and thus to increase their employability.

*Amongst our partners is the **Vox Institute**, a multidisciplinary institute specialized in the strategic use of the human voice. Dr Branka Zei Pollermann, the founder of the institute, explains her approach in this autumn edition of Talent at Work.*

*For some ten years now, we have also been working closely with our Swiss German counterparts **Grass & Partners**. This anniversary provides us with a unique opportunity to discover contrasting perspectives from Geneva and Zurich, highlighting similarities and differences between our two regions as seen from an HR and career management point of view.*

We hope you enjoy this issue and wish you all the best for this autumn!

How to switch to an active voice

Dr Branka Zei Pollermann



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Based in Geneva, the Vox Institute is a unique research and training institute, which combines science and practice. It undertakes in-depth acoustic analyses of executives' voices in a scientific manner, in order to be able to pinpoint strengths and help overcome weaknesses. By quantifying a certain number of voice-related parameters – such as modulation, pitch, volume, or rate of delivery, for instance – it becomes possible to objectivize communications skills, in particular the degree of emotional implication in what is being said, and to measure those skills in reference to an «ideal» voice model.

Above and beyond this course, which concentrates purely on the strategic approach to training a voice, the institute offers a complete program aiming to improve all other aspects linked to non-verbal communications. It also organizes seminars and proposes methodologies on motivation at work and managing emotions, based on behavioral analyses which have been evidenced by the most up-to-date scientific research.

Branka Zei Pollermann, the founder of the institute, who holds a doctorate in psychology, recently made international headlines by comparing voice analyses of Barack Obama, John McCain and Gordon Brown, following a mandate received from a UK consultancy. She explains below to what extent this kind of training can be of use in a professional environment. Von Rohr & Associates is certainly convinced of its benefits, since they have been offering the Vox Institute's services to selected executives for over ten years.

Branka Zei, what led you to set up the Vox Institute?

I have always worked in a scientific environment, spending over ten years with the Psychology Department of

the University of Geneva, and eighteen years doing part-time research at the University Hospital in Geneva. I first trained as an English teacher, then as a linguist and phonetician, and finally took my doctorate in cognitive and social psychology. But when I worked within a university context, I realized that many precious discoveries stay in the hallways of academia, stuck on bookshelves, gathering dust, with no concrete applications. In my view, science feeds into daily practice, which constantly generates new questions: it's then up to science to come up with new answers.

What process do you follow when coaching someone's voice?

The first step is to undertake an audit. We record several voice samples, so as to be able to evaluate how the person's voice changes depending on the content. Candidates describe different situations where they felt joy, sadness or anger, and then simulate some professional content in their speech. As everyone has their own way of expressing themselves, they in fact end up comparing themselves with themselves. All of these samples are acoustically analyzed and presented as graphs, which allow us to visualize a numbered, measurable analysis.

Depending on the diagnosis, it is then possible to work on those aspects which might present some deficiencies. For instance, if someone's voice is monotonous, then that will be the first issue we will address. Some criteria are quite specific: for instance, if the frequency of a male voice exceeds 120Hz, it can be considered as slightly high-pitched. Sometimes candidates also arrive at the institute with a very precise idea of the model they want to sound like - an actor or a journalist, for instance – and we use this as a point of reference for our work together.

“Science feeds into practice”



Where do your clients come from?

Some of them are referred to us by their managers or superiors. For instance, a senior manager sent two secretaries along because he didn't want «little mice» answering the phone; he considered that their voices created the first impression of his company, just as much as a business card would do. Others come to us spontaneously because they feel uncomfortable with their way of expressing themselves. Certain people come in search of excellence in verbal communication - for instance the occasional leading executive with an unfortunate reputation for being unclear or boring. Still others want to solve a specific problem, such as a lack of fluidity in their manner of speaking or the correction of a very strong accent.

Von Rohr & Associates offers this service to certain candidates in career transition programs aiming to resolve specific or general issues which can arise when there is a discrepancy between actual skills and the image that is projected. For instance, there are cases where a candidate never seems to be able to obtain a second job interview: this type of training can speed up the search process, because he or she will project a more «aligned», more coherent image.

Have you observed differences between men and women in this area?

Without making any sweeping generalizations, it is noticeable that men have an approach which is more strongly linked to their search for power, and they want to use their voice strategically with that objective in mind. They also tend to have more monotonous voices and less fluidity in their speech patterns. Women, however, tend to want a «fair» position, the one that they believe and feel they deserve. Their voices are naturally less monotonous, but, in an interesting paradox, they tend to curb themselves when expressing their feelings, in order to avoid appearing too «emotional» in a male-orientated social world. In fact, while emotions need to be measured and carefully dosed, they should certainly not be eliminated.

**“Ultimately,
it's all a matter of
congruence”**

What are the principal skills which you seek to develop?

First of all, you need to learn to segment what you say into units depending on the meaning – we call this «chunking». Then, you must practice on focusing information, adding emphasis to your speech by accentuating the most important words. Finally, it is essential to choose the intonation of your voice according to the goal you want to attain. For instance, in order to convince someone, it is better to avoid rising intonations, which can signal uncertainty or even aggression. In the final analysis, the most important element is congruence, in other words complete convergence between what is said and the manner in which it is said. Credibility, persuasion and charisma result in large part from this element, and being able to master it is a major advantage in repositioning yourself on the job market.

Marie-Hélène Hancock

A candidate's perspective

Frédéric*, an executive in transition supported by Von Rohr, shares his experience with the Vox Institute.

“At the outset, I did not spontaneously feel that I needed this program. However, my Von Rohr coach strongly suggested that I work on my image and explore the way I am perceived by others. My meeting with Branka Zei convinced me right away: one very quickly spots the do's and the don't's, and the visual improvements were both immediate and striking. We then started working on my voice. I realized that one often underestimates the impact of one's voice on others. Yet we use it as a means of communication from early childhood onwards, without having ever really learnt how to master it. We went through numerous exercises to improve my intonation, modulation and rate of delivery, as well as my pitch. Here too, progress was rapidly perceptible, with lasting results. Today, I manage to get messages across more clearly, and to use my voice to convince my counterparts or to defuse tense situations. If I had a piece of advice to share with a fellow candidate, I would recommend that he/she approach the Vox Institute with an open mind, ready to be challenged and to welcome a constructive performance review.”

*fictitious name

Geneva, Zurich: same country, different reality?

Marie-Hélène Hancock



Eva von Rohr



For ten years now Von Rohr & Associates has partnered with Zurich-based Grass Group, offering career counseling services on a truly national level. How do Eva von Rohr and Riet Grass see the other side of Switzerland? A cross-Sarine interview provides some insights.

How do you see the current labor market situation in Geneva and in Zurich?

Eva von Rohr: The market is smaller in Geneva, and is also quite specific because of the high proportion of multinational companies and financial institutions. Things appear to be picking up, but unemployment may continue to rise for a while before the economy really recovers. Companies prefer flexible solutions for the moment, such as interim work.

Riet Grass: Banking and insurance were heavily impacted during 2009, but as of this autumn we also started receiving requests from the industrial sector. The only branch which hasn't been touched by the crisis is the public sector! Media and tourism have also suffered quite strongly.

What are the main differences in approach which you have noticed between the two regions as far as HR management is concerned?

EvR: The presence of European headquarters has a strong influence on our market, because their HR policy generally follows that of the main headquarters. This has led to a certain commoditization of the market, with a corresponding leveling and standardization of services. However, we maintain our niche positioning by specializing in the development of tailor-made services.

RG: In Zurich, we do not have the same pressure on prices which stems from the multinational corpora-

tions. We work mainly with Swiss companies, and their approach to outplacement is very different.

Do you offer the same services in both the French- and German-speaking parts of Switzerland?

EvR: Yes. However, given the specificities of the Geneva market, we tend to offer more spouse career continuation services for expatriates who have followed their partners and wish to pursue their career in Switzerland.

RG: Yes, which allows us to provide companies with a truly national service offer.

Is there something that you really like about Zurich/Geneva?

EvR: Seen from Geneva, it seems to me that Zurich is much more open to new trends, in art as well as in other fields. And the decision-making process is much quicker, with a more structured and predictable approach. But then again, I am myself originally Swiss German!

RG: I come from the Engadine, so I am really almost Latin even if I work in Zurich. As a result, I feel

comfortable in Suisse romande, where people have a life outside of work: there is less stress and it's a friendlier and more human lifestyle. And the wine is good, especially the white wine.

... and something which you find irritating?

EvR: Maybe the fact that speaking French ensures that you are heard, but if you want to be understood, you have to speak Swiss German. French is not a national language in Zurich.

RG: Well, actually... nothing.



Riet Grass



www.grassgroup.ch

VON ROHR & ASSOCIATES S.A.

47, avenue Blanc
CH – 1202 Geneva
Tel. +41 22 901 33 40
Fax +41 22 901 33 41

9, avenue de Beaumont
CH – 1012 Lausanne
Tel. +41 21 321 12 50
Fax +41 21 321 12 51

Von Rohr & Associates S.A.

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