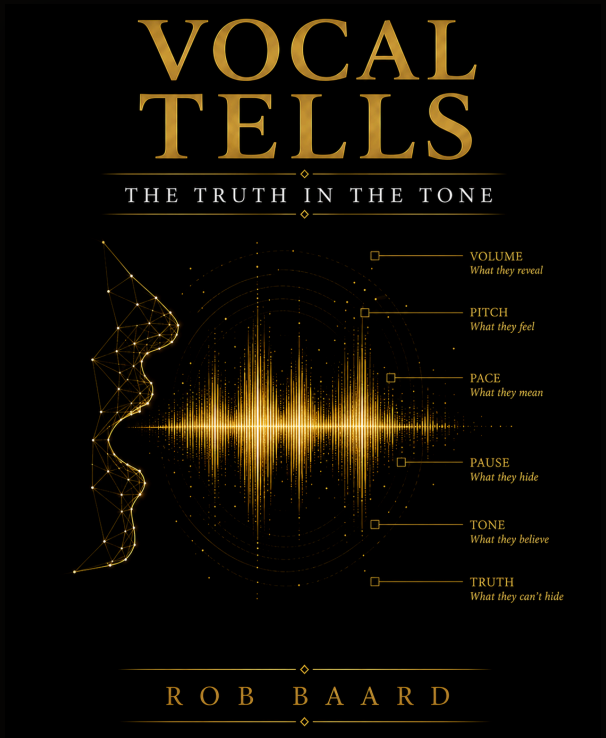
FREE COMPANION GUIDE · VOCAL TELLS

The 8 Vocal Tells Most People Miss

Hearing the truth in the tone — the stress the words can't hide.



Rob Baard

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THE DOCTRINE

Baseline. Cluster. Context.

The voice tells the truth the words try to hide. Under stress, effort, or feeling, the voice leaks what the speaker would rather keep back — through pitch, pace, volume, pause, and breath. That leak is what this book trains you to hear.

But a single sound means little on its own. Reading a voice means reading a whole person — their baseline, the situation, and the cluster of signals around one moment. Chase a single tell and you will be wrong; read the whole picture and you will be right far more often.

And it stops at the honest line: the voice shows a person's *state*, never a verdict on their honesty. You leave a better listener — not a lie detector.

> *Hear the state, not a verdict. Baseline, cluster, context — and never name a liar.*

The Eight Vocal Channels

Emotion and effort leak through the same channels in every voice. This guide walks each one — what it reveals and what it can't. The full manual takes them through 31 chapters of science, case study, and field craft.

1. **Pitch** — the voice's barometer for stress.
2. **Pace** — the speed of the mind.
3. **Volume** — arousal and intent, up and down.
4. **Pauses** — what the gaps give away.
5. **Tremor & Tension** — the voice under strain.
6. **Emphasis** — which words get pushed.
7. **Breath** — the engine under the voice.
8. **Fillers** — the seams where speech is built.

TELL 1 OF 8

Pitch.

The voice's barometer for stress.

Pitch is the most sensitive dial the voice has for arousal. When tension rises the vocal cords tighten and pitch climbs, often without the speaker noticing. When it falls, it can mean control, sadness, or authority put on for the moment.

Why pitch leaks

— Arousal pushes pitch up on its own — a normally low voice can go thin and high under pressure.

— A deliberately lowered voice is doing work: control, gravity, or authority worn for the room.

— Raised pitch is real but a weak lie cue alone — stress lifts it whether a person is honest or not.

— Only a shift off that person's normal pitch counts; a high voice is not stressed by default.

> *Pitch climbs with the pressure — but pressure is not proof.*

TELL 2 OF 8

Pace.

The speed of the mind.

Pace tracks arousal and mental effort. Words tumble out with excitement or nerves; they slow when someone is thinking hard, carrying a load, or low in mood. The real signal is a change in pace, not the speed itself.

What pace gives away

— Speeding up can mean nerves, enthusiasm, or a well-drilled line delivered a beat too smoothly.

— Slowing can mean careful thought or heavy load — someone doing the maths as they speak.

— A pace that shifts partway through an answer — fluent, then suddenly halting on one detail — is the tell.

— Fast and slow talkers both exist; judge against their normal, never against yours.

> *It is the change of pace, not the pace, that carries the meaning.*

TELL 3 OF 8

Volume.

Loudness, up and down.

Volume tracks arousal and intent. Rising volume can assert, threaten, or drown out a weak point; a voice that shrinks can mean retreat, discomfort, or forced calm. Read the shift, not the level.

How volume leaks

— Getting louder can bury a weak point as easily as press a strong one.

— An answer that drops to almost nothing can mean shame, withdrawal, or control held tight.

— A sudden change on one word — a name spoken quieter than everything around it — is a timing cue.

— Loud and soft speakers exist; the shift off their baseline is the signal, not the volume.

> *Watch the word that suddenly goes quiet.*

TELL 4 OF 8

Pauses.

What the gaps say.

Silence carries as much as sound. Longer or more frequent pauses can mark the effort of building an answer — the gap while a story is assembled. A beat before a simple answer can signal construction, always read in context.

Reading the gaps

- A pause can be filled with an “um” or fully silent, and where it falls matters as much as its length.
- More pausing, or longer pauses, can mark the mental effort of assembling a reply.
- A beat before a simple question — “Where were you last night?” … — is worth noting, in context.
- Some people pause naturally; measure against their rhythm, not against silence itself.

> *The pause before the answer is where the work happens.*

TELL 5 OF 8

Tremor & Tension.

The voice under strain.

Strain shows as tremor, tightness, and breaks. Arousal produces a micro-tremor and an audible shake; tension narrows the voice and thins the sound. A voice that cracks on a word marks an emotional hotspot.

Why strain shows

— A wavering voice fighting to stay level is a voice under load.

— A tight throat thins the sound — the strained "I'm okay."

— A break on a specific word or name flags exactly where the feeling sits.

— Strain and honest, overwhelming emotion are both real — neither one proves a lie.

> *A voice can shake from grief as easily as from guilt.*

TELL 6 OF 8

Emphasis.

Which words get pushed.

Where the weight lands shows what matters to the speaker. Natural emphasis reveals priorities — the word someone leans on without noticing. Too much emphasis can tip over into protest.

What emphasis reveals

— “I didn't take YOUR money” and “I didn't TAKE your money” say very different things.

— The word a speaker leans on without noticing shows what they actually care about.

— Over-stressing — “I would NEVER do that” — can signal defensiveness, read as a cluster, never as proof.

— Some speakers are emphatic by nature; measure the change, not the habit.

> *Listen for the word they lean on.*

TELL 7 OF 8

Breath.

The engine under the voice.

Breath drives the voice and shows state before the words do. Emotion and arousal change its depth and rhythm — the sharp intake before bad news, the answer squeezed out on no air.

Why breath gives it away

— A quick gasp before speaking can mark a jolt — the inhale on hearing an accusation.

— Held or shallow breathing signals bracing or fear.

— Breath that becomes hearable — a shaky exhale before speaking — is a load cue.

— Fitness, health, and habit all vary; read the change, not the breathing itself.

> *The breath moves before the words do.*

TELL 8 OF 8

Fillers.

The seams where speech is built.

Fillers — um, uh, like — mark the seams where speech is being assembled. A rise in fillers can track mental effort, especially when they spike on one question. It is the increase off baseline that matters.

Reading the stumbles

— A fluent talker suddenly full of "um" is working harder than a moment ago.

— Fillers spiking on one specific question, tied to that moment, is the signal.

— Some people always say "like" — baseline separates habit from signal.

— Disfluencies rise with difficulty, not necessarily deception — never a lie test on their own.

> *The stumble marks the effort, not the lie.*

THE COMPLETE MANUAL

Vocal Tells.

This guide gave you the eight channels. The full manual takes them through 31 chapters — why the voice leaks, baseline, clusters and context, the little sounds, accent and culture, the voice before violence, the interview room, real documented case studies, and the honest limits of reading people.

Grounded in peer-reviewed research and a working life spent listening — not guesswork, not opinion dressed up as fact.

> *Hear the state, not a verdict.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Rob Baard is a Bujinkan Ninjutsu Shihan and licensed Private Investigator with over thirty years of training. He studied directly under Grandmaster Masaaki Hatsumi in Japan. His documentary on the tradition was screened by invitation at the Togakushi Ninja Mountain ceremony and is now permanently exhibited at the Togakushi Ninja Museum, Japan.

Vocal Tells — The Truth in the Tone is his book on reading the voice, a companion to Micro Expressions and Body Language.

GET THE BOOKS

The Rob Baard Library.

Vocal Tells trains the ear to hear what a voice gives away beneath its words. It sits alongside Micro Expressions and Body Language — three ways to read the same person, and together a working education in reading people and keeping yourself safe.

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> *Hear the state, not a verdict.*

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