

How to speak more confidently in meetings

blog.gotomeeting.co.uk/2016/12/21/how-to-speak-more-confidently-in-meetings.html

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12/21/2016



Meetings can be a great platform to get yourself recognised professionally, and if you present yourself confidently they can often help to advance your career.

Meetings can often showcase an individual's ability to 'think outside the box', and come up with a solution to a complex business problem. But if you're consistently quiet in meetings, rarely making a contribution, this can unfortunately (and in some cases, unfairly) be mistaken for lack of interest, or an absence of structured thought and creativity. Furthermore, if you lack the confidence to express your ideas and opinions, it can also be extremely frustrating and demoralising when someone else speaks up and takes the credit for a concept you'd already thought of.

The average employee spends about one-third of his or her work week in meetings, so they're the best opportunity you have to make your expertise known," notes business coach [Joel Garfinkle](#). He observes that people often hesitate to speak up for a variety of reasons, ranging from simple shyness, through to perfectionism, or the fear of confrontation and having your opinions challenged.

If you're struggling to express yourself and be noticed within your company meetings, here are 10 ways to help you speak more confidently, which you could set as a personal challenge for 2017...

1. Prepare a topic to speak about, in advance

Just as you would rehearse a speech or presentation, it can be helpful to brief yourself fully in advance of a meeting, and prepare a topic to speak on which you feel confident and knowledgeable about. It's sensible to pick a subject

which is unlikely to be controversial, to avoid unwanted confrontation. If you feel the need for some notes to prompt you, don't hold back, as this will only serve to show the effort you've put into preparing for the meeting.

2. Practice, outside of the meeting

Practice makes perfect."One way shy people can gain confidence to speak in meetings is to practice outside of meetings," says Susan Newman, co-founder of [School2Life](#), an organisation that helps students transition to the workforce.

"Share your point of view and participate in conversations in and out of the workplace. Doing this helps you recognise where the discomfort sets in. In time, it will get easier or more manageable because you'll know what to expect from your nerves. So speak up and speak often."

3. Be as succinct as possible

When you speak, concentrate on making your initial point as succinctly as possible, before anyone has the chance to interrupt. You could almost think of setting yourself a Twitter-style 140 character limit, so that the opinion you express is clear and concise.

"If you fear that someone will interrupt you before you finish, preface your ideas with something like, 'I have four observations to make about the situation. First ...,' and then keep enumerating as you go along so that people understand you're not finished when you take a breath," advises Dianna Booher, author of *Communicate with Confidence* and *Speak with Confidence*.

4. Avoid self-editing

Don't lose opportunities to share your views and be seen as the integral person you are, through self-editing. If you find yourself debating internally whether the comment you would like to make is a worthwhile contribution, then you are unlikely to say it. Remember that having your opinions heard can be incredibly satisfying. Have conviction in your thoughts and ideas, and avoid self-censoring.

5. Ask questions

Questions are often a less daunting way of getting your voice heard within a meeting room. Use your knowledge of a project or subject matter to probe more deeply into what others are saying. Ask questions such as 'how will you measure that?', or 'do you have any research on the subject?', or 'have you used this tactic before?' etc. This avoids the need for a long speech, and can be an effective way to gain confidence in speaking out loud.

6. Try to be the first to speak up

Going by personal experience, I know that the longer you leave it to speak up, the more likely panic will set in, and the more daunting it will be to say anything at all. The sooner you speak, the less time there will be to generate self-doubt. Once you feel like you're helping to lead a discussion, this will naturally give you confidence to contribute more.

7. Don't be tempted to wait for a eureka moment

Speak when you want to speak, and not just when you have something earth-shattering to say. If you spend the meeting waiting for a 'eureka' thought to enter your mind, you are setting yourself a tall challenge, and likely to fail!

8. Remember to breathe!

If put on the spot within a meeting, a tip from [Caroline Goyder](#), within her TEDx talk, *The surprising secret to speaking with confidence*, is to close your mouth so that you remember to inhale. Abdominal breathing will make you sound confident by giving strength to your voice, removing any shakiness. This will also help you to feel more relaxed and buy you time to think about what to say.

9. Speak slowly and make eye contact

When you get nervous, it's not just your heart rate that quickens. Your words tend to speed up too. It's important to make a conscious effort to talk significantly slower than you would do normally, and don't worry about meeting attendees picking up on this, as they won't.

Additionally, try to make eye contact with everyone around the room when you're talking. Rather than shooting glances across the table, rest your focus on one individual at a time, for a few seconds, and remember to smile. This will help you to connect with attendees on a more personal level, adding weight to the point you are making.

10. Study others

It can help to learn from someone aspirational within your team, who is exceptionally good at speaking confidently, without dominating the conversation. Choose an individual who is consistently good at capturing the attention of those in the room, and study them to identify what it is that makes them so respected when they speak. Attributes might include the tone of voice they use, their expression, body language, their friendly attitude, or the way in which they structure their argument. Take these onboard and practice adopting their best qualities.

Have you overcome your fear of speaking up in meetings? If so, we would love to hear how you achieved it, below.