

How to speak up at work and get noticed

Don't get tongue tied when you've got something to say.

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Speaking up at work is not easy, especially if you're fairly new to the job, are a bit introverted, or work with a lot of loud people with big personalities. But the only way to be heard and make sure everyone gets to know you is to find opportunities to use that voice of yours and speak up.

"We often have a lot of fear about bringing up opposing ideas in the workplace because we think it's going to create a major conflict, or worse, get us fired," says Vince Trevino, partner at Bridgepoint Consulting, a management consulting firm. After all, you were hired to bring your experience and unique point of view to the table. "Good leaders should expect you to disagree with them from time to time," says Trevino.

The key is to choose the right moment and to speak up in the right way. Here are some strategies that will help you have the confidence to speak your mind.



Choose the right moments to speak up at work.

Figure out how to get a word in

If gathering in a large conference room with a lot of big talkers is new and/or uncomfortable to you, it's easy to feel intimidated. But you've got to try to cut through the noise because it's the perfect forum for people to get to know you and to share ideas. However, you don't want to interrupt others or have your voice drowned out.

What you can try is using some non-verbal communication or physical gestures to ask for your turn to speak. Trying to chime in over other voices is futile and frustrating, says Dean Karrel, career and executive coach with The Skyridge Group. "For me, I try to wait for the right moment and raise my hand to get the moderator's attention."

If you had an important message that you just weren't able to get across, don't fret. Karrel suggests reaching out to key colleagues right after the meeting (while the matter is still fresh) to communicate directly.

Learn how to disagree gracefully

Whether it's how to approach a project or disagreements with colleagues, bringing up tough issues can be awkward. But as they say, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, so speaking up at work and having a discussion is sometimes necessary—especially if the issue is important to you personally.

It's all about the right delivery, says Karrel. "These conversations are always best handled privately. Schedule some time after you've had a chance to collect your thoughts, maybe cool down a bit, and focus on the message you want to give," he suggests.

Also important is trying not to be confrontational, and instead, using curiosity and candor. "Discuss the issue or disagreement with questions rather than arguing the point head-on," Trevino says. You can say something like:

- Can I share with you a few observations?
- I'm curious, can you tell me more?
- Have you thought about the issue this way?
- Help me understand. How did you get to that conclusion?

"This approach helps the other person step outside of the issue and consider a new perspective," says Trevino, "which can lead to more productive conversations that end in a solution rather than an argument."

Follow protocol when it comes to speaking with execs

You might be wondering if it's ever OK to approach the top-level managers with an idea or suggestion. The answer is that it really depends on the company culture and your manager.

"Some executives are visible, receptive, and seek out ideas from all levels within their organization," says Karrel. "However, at other places there is a strict hierarchy in place where it's strongly frowned upon to communicate with levels higher than your manager."

Either way, always keep the person you report to in the loop about any communication you have with senior executives, he adds. "Managers hate to be caught off guard hearing about things after the fact."

Prep yourself and be ready for pushback

If you know you have an upcoming meeting and want to share an idea, try running it by someone you trust to get some feedback, suggests Trevino. In addition, try to anticipate any questions that may come up, and be ready to address any potential obstacles or objections.

“I’ve found that it’s best to present your idea in a way that will invite more dialogue and healthy discussion around the issue,” Trevino explains. “One way to accomplish this is by sharing some of your reasoning behind the idea to get buy-in and cooperation, rather than immediate pushback or conflict.”

Another way to gain more confidence is to take the time to do your homework before asking for the floor. “You should always have a firm grasp of the agenda, who’s attending, and have read any materials that were distributed,” says Karrel.

Now that you have a smart speak-up plan, be sure to keep these other important tips in mind:

- Stay focused on one or two key items, not five or six.
- Don’t wait until the end of the meeting to speak up—strike early.
- Make your time count by taking a deep breath and speaking loud enough so people hear you.

Say what you mean, mean what you say

Knowing how to advocate for yourself at work (and in life) is a lesson best learned early on. Don’t expect anyone to have your best interests in mind; they likely have their own needs front and center. Speaking up at work is easier when you feel knowledgeable about the matters at hand, and understanding workplace protocol is a good first step. Want to know more? [Join Monster for free today \(https://member.monster.com\)](https://member.monster.com). As a member, you’ll get career advice, job search tips, and workplace insights sent directly to your inbox to help you hone your communication skills like a pro.