

Speaking Up at Work Made Easy

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How often have you wanted to say something at work, but held back because you were worried about the consequences? Maybe you were afraid of stirring up a conflict or losing your job. Maybe you were just discouraged by the idea that your input wouldn't make a difference.

You're not alone in feeling this way. ***A Harvard Business School study found that half of the employees at the multinational companies they surveyed were afraid to speak up at work or challenge traditional ways of doing things.*** That creates a big loss for business and a potential setback for you.

If you want to impress your boss and have a satisfying career, it's important to learn how to overcome your doubts and fears about your input. Study these tips that will help you to speak up in meetings and around the office.

Overcoming Your Fears

You may be exaggerating the downside of speaking up. Many managers value employee feedback about what customers are really thinking and how corporate policies play out in the real world.

Make yourself an important asset by contributing your wisdom and expertise:

1. **Think long-term.** It's human nature to give more weight to the resistance or embarrassment you expect to happen right away rather than the vaguer rewards that could lie ahead. ***Remind yourself of what you have to gain, like higher self-esteem or a leadership role.***

2. **Act quickly.** Chiming in right away at a meeting has its advantages. There's less opportunity for your anxiety to build up and it's easier to bring up new ideas when the topic is under discussion anyway.

3. **Plan ahead. *Fight shyness by being prepared.*** Scan the agenda for one or more issues you can research ahead of time.

4. **Ask questions.** If there's little you can say about the subject matter, you can still participate. Show that you're interested by asking questions. Voice your support and agreement.

Overcoming Your Doubts

Have you silenced yourself because your proposals rarely see the light of day?

These steps may help you have more impact:

1. **Stay positive.** Sound enthusiastic and upbeat. Show off your creativity by presenting innovative approaches that will save time or increase quality. Be willing to try out suggestions from your colleagues.

2. **Work on your timing.** Your boss may be more open to considering changes if you introduce them during the annual departmental retreat rather than a hectic Monday morning staff meeting. Consider the context.

3. **Develop allies. *Identify colleagues who listen attentively and are open to new ideas.*** You can maximize your influence by banding together.

Additional Tips:

There are some situations where it's especially challenging to assert yourself.

These tips will help you be better prepared for such situations:

1. **Join the team.** If you were recently hired, you may feel like you need to wait a while before anyone will take you seriously. On the other hand, this could provide the perfect circumstances for you to speak up. Outsiders may spot issues that long-timers have grown used to. ***Tell yourself that this is your opportunity to make a dazzling first impression.***
2. **Communicate with senior management.** Many professionals are nervous around the CEO. Brush up on your small talk in case you meet in the cafeteria. Ask how you can be useful if you're traveling together.
3. **Handle gossip.** Distinguish between innocent chatter and remarks that could be hurtful. ***Taking the high road will protect your reputation and encourage a healthy work environment.***
4. **Disagree respectfully.** Arguing the minority viewpoint can work to your advantage. Demonstrate that you can be tactful and brave. Dissent can even help sort out issues that lead to sound decisions.

Speaking up at work is good for you and your employer. Discussions spark ideas and create solutions. Plus, letting your coworkers know where you stand enhances your relationships and gives you more clout.