

# **Speaking with Authority: How to Get People to Really *Listen* and Make Sure Your Voice is *Heard***

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# Why is getting people to listen an issue for women in STEM?

- ❁ We all interpret naturally higher voices as younger voices.
- ❁ We all perceive lower voices as conveying authority and eliciting respect better than higher voices.
- ❁ It is challenging for us to view a woman in a non-stereotypical role (speaker, leader, STEM professional) as competent. If we do view her as competent, we are less likely to like her. (the *Double Bind*)
- ❁ The way that you phrase your message and package it affects the way that people perceive you. Women are socialized to speak in a less authoritative and more communal manner. We don't always react well to women to violate these unwritten communication rules.
- ❁ Filler words (umm, uh huh, well) confuse your message. Qualifiers (perhaps, maybe, I think, I feel, I guess) diminish your authority and present your message in a negative light. You are more likely to use these if you are unsure of yourself. Women have generally higher standards of competence than men.

# So how can you get people to listen?

- ❁ Own the Room
- ❁ Stand like a Champion
- ❁ Put your Elbows on the Table...sorry, Mom
- ❁ Tailor your Message
- ❁ Get to the Point
- ❁ Pace Yourself
- ❁ Cut out Fillers and Qualifiers
- ❁ Inject Warmth and Humor
- ❁ Let go of Self-Doubt

# Own the Room

To speak from a place of strength and authority, you have to **own** them both:

- ✿ Acknowledge that you belong there, that you are an expert, and that you have a right to be heard.
- ✿ Don't act as if you are being tested.
- ✿ Be confident and comfortable – you are a professional, you know your business, you are an expert.
- ✿ This is a mental exercise.
- ✿ Don't be invisible (i.e., sit in the back, hide behind furniture, or keep your head down). Walk in confidently, take your seat at the table, introduce yourself, take up space.

# Stand like a Champion

- Body language is important!
- Giving presentations and making speeches is physical.
- On stage or standing before a group, use the champion stance:
  - Position one foot in front of the other
  - Put your weight on your back foot
  - Hold your head up
  - Drop your shoulders back
  - Lean your torso slightly forward
  - Smile
- Research shows that if you stand in a confident pose, it will actually make you feel more confident!
- Women are socialized to be small, take up very little space, be invisible, to “not be a problem”, to “not be in the way”, etc.



# Put your Elbows on the Table

- ✿ Take up space! It conveys confidence and authority.
- ✿ Sit up straight.
- ✿ Lean forward.
- ✿ Put your forearms and elbows (not just your hands!) on the table.
- ✿ Maintain eye contact with fellow speakers, audience, the camera, etc.

# Tailor your Message

- ❁ When preparing to speak to a group, don't ask *"what am I going to say?"* Instead ask, *"what does my audience need to hear?"*, *"what are they interested in?"*, *"how much do they know about my topic?"*
- ❁ Telling stories can help your audience visualize, understand, and experience (emotionally!) the message that you are trying to convey. This helps them buy in and believe your message.

# Get to the Point

- ✿ “Your competition is the attention span.”
- ✿ Prepare *and* practice.
- ✿ Focus your message (use an outline).
- ✿ Stay on topic and get to the point quickly.
- ✿ Rambling and unfocused speeches make you seem uninformed, uninteresting, and unqualified.



# Pace Yourself

- ❁ Professional broadcasters speak at a pace of 150 words per minute.
- ❁ A slower, more effective pace lends more authority to your ideas.
- ❁ Pause after important sentiments (to give them time to sink in) or after phrases that the audience finds amusing (try to anticipate them!).

# Cut Out Fillers and Qualifiers

- ✿ Fillers (umm, uh huh, well) dilute your message, undermine your power (it sounds like you don't know what you are talking about), and make you seem nervous/unprepared/unfocused. PAUSE instead.
- ✿ Qualifiers make you seem unsure (not authoritative) and can be cop outs for a more valuable and meaningful response.

# Top Ten Qualifiers

## ❁ “I think...” or “I feel...” or “I believe...”

These emotionally-based “discounting phrases” make you seem less authoritative and reduce the power of your words.

Instead of: “I think the best option is...”

Simply say: “The best option for us at this point is to...”

## ❁ “I want to say...” or “I’d like to say...”

Eliminate these altogether.

Instead of: “I want to say thank you...”

Just say: “Thank you...”, “Welcome...”, “What a great job you did...”

# Top Ten Qualifiers

## ❁ “I don’t know...”

While this may be honest, you should provide a more thoughtful response. It can be viewed as lazy or unwilling to take the next step.

Instead of: “**I don’t know the answer...**”

Say: “**Let me find out the answer.**” or

“**Where could I learn how to do that?**” or

“**Where could I find out who is in charge of that?**”

## ❁ “I can’t...”

This makes you seem rigid and unwilling to be helpful, etc. Instead, pinpoint the issue and suggest a way around it.

Instead of: “**I can’t meet then.**”

Say: “**Unfortunately I have a conflict at that time. Could we meet Tuesday morning?**”

# Top Ten Qualifiers

## ❁ “But...”

We are conditioned to listen for negative information. This word completely negates whatever you have said before. Instead, soften the message by using “**and**” or just start a new sentence.

Instead of: “**I would like to come, but I can’t.**”

Say: “**I am interested in that project. I have a conflict on Monday. Could we meet Tuesday morning to discuss next steps?**”

## ❁ “I’ll try...”

This suggests possible failure!

Instead of: “**I’ll try to get that done.**”

Say: “**I can have that for you next week.**” or

“**I don’t have time to do a quality job of this at present. Donna should be able to assist you.**” or

“**I am probably not the best person to work on this project. Let me suggest that you talk with Dan.**”



# Top Ten Qualifiers

## ❁ “I guess...”

This is tentative language and does not reflect confidence. Eliminate it. If you have a concern, then express it directly.

Instead of: “**I guess that might work.**”

Say: “**I am concerned that this won’t work because....**”

# Inject Warmth and Humor

- ❁ Be genuine – it invites your audience to listen and helps you establish credibility.
- ❁ Humor can help you connect with your audience, but beware of telling jokes. Humor based on a funny experience, funny response or poking fun at yourself (but not too much), usually comes across better.
- ❁ Practice humor – if you have a line or short story that consistently gets laughs in multiple settings, it is probably okay to use.

# Let Go of Self-Doubt

- ✿ Trust yourself and the importance of your words.
- ✿ Practice speaking before peer groups – volunteer to moderate a session at a conference, give a speech at a social or family gathering, ask someone your trust to be your “audience” and practice before a big speech (its even better if you know each other well enough for them to give you constructive feedback).

# Questions?

You can find all of our presentations on the **ADVANCEing Faculty Website** at:

<http://www.advance.latech.edu>

Next Month's Lunch: Friday, November 2  
WE WILL MEET IN BOGARD HALL.

# References

- ❁ Goudreau, J., *10 Phrases That Are Holding Your Career Back*, ForbesWoman, October 3, 2012; <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2012/10/03/10-phrases-that-are-holding-your-career-back/>, accessed October 9, 2012.
- ❁ Goudreau, J., *How To Speak With Authority*, ForbesWoman, October 26, 2011; <http://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2011/10/26/how-to-speak-with-authority-hillary-clinton-michelle-obama/>, accessed October 9, 2012.