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3 tips to power up your speech

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Twenty-five years of guiding women to become effective communicators has led me to an unfortunate observation: We may be unwittingly creating our own glass ceilings because our communication style, vocabulary and delivery can sometimes project uncertainty rather than confidence.

How do I know this? I talk — and listen — a lot. I’ve spoken to close to 100,000 women at more than 2,500 seminars, workshops and keynote addresses during my career. I deliver workshops nationwide on effective communication and presentation methods necessary for women’s workplace success.

While we’re often quick to notice others’ verbal tics, such as the ubiquitous “ums” or “likes” that can be peppered throughout a presentation, we need to recognize that our own verbal styles may undercut our hard work and abilities as leaders.

Women must learn to speak clearly and decisively to sound powerful and persuasive. If you think your verbal game could use a few pointers, heed these tips next time you’re in the office.

1. Ditch the junk.

Some women use inflection, verbal hedges, add-ons and the use of the “indecisive I” that can act as auditory albatrosses. Once women realize these extraneous words can be harming perception of our abilities, we can work to eliminate them from our vocabularies.

2. Don’t sugarcoat your thoughts.

Use of qualifying words such as “just” or “perhaps” throughout a conversation or presentation may not be interpreted as conciliatory language used to “soften up” coworkers to come around to our points of view. Instead, qualifying statements can be interpreted as expressions of indecision.

3. You don’t need permission to ask a question.

I see women at meetings or conferences go, “I would just like to ask a question.” Just ask it! Phrasing it that way communicates weakness and lack of confidence. Asking the question directly is affirming the belief that you have the right to ask questions in the workplace at any time. When you do, ask insightful, pointed questions that show you’ve done your homework.

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