



Women, Find Your Power Through Confident Communication [10 Top Tips]

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Intro

When asked what advice she would give professional women, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright replied, “Learn to interrupt.” Sound rude? Think again. Albright learned the hard way that you won’t get anywhere if you don’t speak up. Unfortunately, a lot of women in the workplace still make the mistake of not joining the conversation, and not making their voices heard.

Now, more than ever, women need to act with a sense of urgency to increase their influence in the workplace and in their communities. Here are several sobering data points that illustrate why, from a 2020 IBM study, [“Women, Leadership, and the Priority Paradox”](#):

“Despite abundant evidence that gender equality in leadership is good for business, an overwhelming majority of organizations say advancing women into leadership roles is not a formal business priority. In fact, women hold only 18 percent of senior leadership positions among 2,300 organizations surveyed worldwide. In other words, men occupy approximately 82 percent of the most influential roles in today’s organizations. And promoting women is not a formal business priority at 79 percent of surveyed organizations.”

Time to step in and rattle some cages—and use our power to make change happen.

As a communications training company that is not only led by a woman, but also, is passionate about diversity in the workplace, we took action several years ago by developing a focused program called [Confident Speaking for Women](#) to help working women find their power through clear, confident communication. Not surprisingly, it’s one of our most popular workshops.

Today, I want to share some of the top tips we teach in the program, to get you started (or continue) on the path to becoming a powerful communicator who gets noticed and gets results.

And here’s the really exciting thing: you’ll also hear directly from some of the dozens of female executives we interviewed while developing the workshop. Women like Yvonne

Lin Liu, MD, Medical Director, [Genentech](#); Lynne Zaledonis, SVP, Product Marketing, [Salesforce](#); and Dr. Bindu Garapaty, VP of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Talent Development, [Impossible Foods](#), offer priceless advice from their own high-powered careers. Here's just one example:

"I always tell people, no one is going to come tap you on the shoulder and say, 'Hey, it's time to be promoted!' You actually need to be the one asking, 'When is this happening for me, what's the time line, and what do you need to see from me in the next six months to make this happen?'" Shannon Stubo Brayton, Partner and Chief Marketing Officer, [Bessemer Venture Partners](#)

In developing the workshop and interviewing the executives, we noticed three overarching pieces of advice. We call them the "3Cs of effective communication": **Be Clear, Be Confident, and Be Courageous**. So, all of our top tips fall under one of these three areas of wisdom.

Be Clear

Tip 1

Avoid Talk Traps

Cindy Solomon, leadership development consultant, author, and owner of the [Courageous Leadership Institute®](#), urges women to avoid "talk traps" that muddy their message.

"When women put a lot of inconsequential words around their thoughts or their ideas or their opinions, or they hedge, apologize, come up at the end vocally as if they're asking permission for their opinion or idea," she says, "all of those things diminish the content because of the delivery."

Wondering if you're guilty of falling into talk traps? Check out this short list of common

offenders . . .

Talk traps undermine your credibility



HEDGE	"I'm not sure but I think it is our time to use the conference room."
TAG QUESTIONS	"You are about to leave, right?"
INDIRECT	"Do you know what time it is?"
QUALIFY	"I could be wrong but I believe we have this room booked."
APOLOGIZE	"I'm so sorry but I need this conference room."
FILLER	"I, um, think it's, like, our time to, um, use the conference, um, room."

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Now that you know what **not** to do, let's move on to the next key piece of advice.

Tip 2

Get to the point

You'll be perceived as a powerful communicator if you frame the discussion and focus on key findings—before becoming engrossed in the detail.

Nina Richardson, [Silicon Labs](#) Board Member, says she learned over time that when asked to give an update on a project, she was more effective if she not only summarized, but also, synthesized the data in her response.

"Often, someone was looking to me as a leader to take the information and just give the kernels or the bits and pieces that were important, not the laundry list of everything that actually happened."

Have you struggled with "packaging" your message and supporting data so they have the most impact? Well, here's a tool that can help . . .

Tip 3

Use the PREP Model to create a clear, compelling message

This framework will help you to be clear and succinct when pitching an idea or making a proposal.

PREP clearly articulates a request

P Would you be willing to be my mentor? Ideally, I'd like 1 hour of your time once a month.

R The reason I'm asking is that I found your recent virtual presentation really engaging and I'd love to be able to pitch an idea I have to the leadership team in the same way.

E My idea is around a fast-track leadership program and I'd like to make sure my presentation comes across well in a virtual environment.

P Would you agree to mentor me, and could I put an hour on your calendar next week?

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Rajani Shailender, Vice President of Sales for [Tech Mahindra](#), offers this:

“My personal philosophy with communication is, read your audience, speak to the main points, explain where you have to. Move on when you're done. Get your point across in the shortest amount of time that you can.”

Here's more great advice about being clear and concise, from several of the female executives we interviewed:



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Be Confident

Tip 4

Make a powerful entrance

Have you or a coworker ever walked into a meeting with a hot mess of bags, files, laptop, and cell phone, then went straight to a chair and plopped down? That appearance of chaos and not introducing yourself give the *wrong* impression.

Listen to Cindy Solomon explain how women make themselves “invisible” if they don’t make a powerful entrance:



One of our clients, Carol L. Collins-Carriveau, Pharm.D., MAEd, Senior Director, Medical Sciences, Gilead Sciences, saw the real-world power of introductions after attending our [Confident Speaking for Women](#) workshop.

“It really does work. It also helps to instill confidence in yourself,” she says. “In addition to introducing myself when I enter a meeting, I also have a prepared statement as to what value I bring to my organization. I used it twice this year—once with an executive vice president and once with our CEO. They were impressed and engaged me in a deeper conversation.”

Tip 5

Speak Up!

Going back to Madeleine Albright’s “Learn to interrupt” advice . . .

We perked up in an interview with Shannon when she offered the idea of “finding on-ramps” into conversations. She suggests *“finding phrases that allow you to get into the conversation, in a way that you’re comfortable with,”* like: “Have we ever thought about?”; “Tell me more—I’d like to know more about that”; or “I see the challenge; I’d like to suggest we take a different approach.”

No rudeness necessary. Just a commitment to making sure your voice is heard, and that you seize the opportunity to contribute to your organization’s success.

Tip 6

Use strong nonverbal communication

Whether you’re in a virtual meeting or making an in-person presentation, your body language has a huge impact on how well you can engage, and elicit trust and buy-in from potential clients, coworkers, or a public audience.

Having a strong stance and gestures has an added benefit: it can help you feel more confident. [Dr. Amy Cuddy](#), social psychologist, bestselling author, and award-winning Harvard lecturer, presented that research finding in her now-famous TED Talk, "[Your Body Language May Shape Who You Are.](#)" If you haven't seen it or seen it lately, it's a 21-minute jewel.

To practice a more powerful nonverbal presence, focus on these three areas:

Eye contact – There's nothing like looking straight at your audience when you speak to build your credibility and encourage trust. Speaking of eye contact, remember to turn on your webcam when you're connecting virtually. Your profile photo or icon on Zoom doesn't give people a sense that you're "really there."

Stance and Gestures – It's only common sense: Stand tall, and you project confidence. Use effective gestures while you talk, and you're more likely to keep people's attention. Unfortunately, many of us don't create a powerful physical presence when we speak.

Voice – Ever nodded off while someone with a monotone voice droned on? The fact is, vocal variety keeps people interested and engaged. So, what do we mean by vocal variety?



Don't miss this additional advice about how your physical presence can either make or break people's perception of you as a confident speaker . . .



Be Courageous

Tip 7

Build your own “board of directors” and look for mentors

One of the things successful women do is make strong connections with people they can learn from and lean on. Dr. Bindu Garapatay, VP of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Talent Development at [Impossible Foods](#), put it best . . .

“I went through an experience where it was a very public failure. The main thing that I learned from that was that the community I built along the way, that was there through thick and thin, will be there to support me.”

Listen to other executives talk about what it means to be courageous, and how important it is to find mentors and advisors . . .



Tip 8

Get out of your comfort zone

You've heard the clichés: Nothing ventured, nothing gained; No pain, no gain; and how about, Just do it. Easier said than done, right? But stretching to new heights and taking risks that move you forward is always worth the effort.

Tip 9

Grow from your mistakes

Salesforce SVP of Product Marketing Lynne Zaledonis said that over the years, she's shared with other women that she cried in the bathroom several times after experiencing "failures"? Well, she ultimately triumphed by committing to growth, . . .

"Even at my level, you can have your confidence rattled. But I figured it out, I leaned on mentors, I took on side projects, I asked for assistance, I asked more questions—because it was sink or swim... and darned if it doesn't feel so much better to be in this role having earned it, than to have it be easy."

Tip 10

Take action

Nike really does have it right. There comes a time when “Just do it” is the best action. That said, the old adage about scaling a mountain one step at a time is also wise counsel. So, start by making an action checklist.

Here’s one we use in our [Confident Speaking for Women](#) workshop...

WHAT ACTION WILL YOU TAKE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL?

- Take a speaking class
- Join Toastmasters
- Practice your speeches with peers
- Ask for chances to speak / lead
- Recruit mentors for your board of directors
- Take leadership roles in the community
- Identify a peer-support partner for feedback
- Volunteer to be a coach

Conclusion

I hope these tips and listening to successful business women have inspired you. Learning to tap into your power by elevating your communication skills isn’t easy. But wherever you are on that learning journey, know that you aren’t alone, and that there are a wealth of resources and communities out there. So, reach out.

In the meantime, I’d like to share with you our free white paper, “Circles of Light: Women’s Wisdom,” which captures even more of the insights and lessons learned from the women we interviewed.

But before you start reading and making your action plan, I’d like to hear from you.

Which tip or executive insight was your favorite?

...Or maybe you have a suggestion that I didn't cover here?

Either way, let me know by leaving a comment below



About the Author

Carrie Beckstrom

Chief Executive Officer, PowerSpeaking, Inc.

CEO Carrie Beckstrom and the PowerSpeaking team are passionate about helping organizations—at corporations like Genentech, eBay, Autodesk, and Gilead Sciences—develop powerful communication skills that inspire people and get results.

Prior to joining PowerSpeaking, Carrie enjoyed more than 30 years' experience in the learning and development industry, where she led teams that made Training Magazine's "Training Top 125" 10 years in a row. Then, as now, she believes that "Our purpose is to make great people even greater at what they do every day."

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Become More Powerful Communicators**

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