



## SPEAK UP IN MEETINGS WITH CONFIDENCE AND GET YOUR IDEAS HEARD

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Going to meetings is a fact of life in any business. Although email flows like a raging river through our business day, there is nothing like a face-to-face meeting to get things done. It might be easy to assume "we can discuss that through e-mail," but if you've been in business longer than a nanosecond you know that often the written word just doesn't cut it. When there are important issues to be discussed, or brainstorming to be done, face-to-face meetings are still the way to go.

Speaking up in meetings and contributing important ideas not only scores brownie points with your boss, but it demonstrates to everyone in your organization that you are well suited for your role and ready for the next big job. Being a wallflower is not an option. You may prefer to be quiet or think things through, but you have to have a presence in meetings. It is vital to your career. You never know who is sitting in the room or what opportunity might come your way if they see you as a contributor.

A few years back, I attended the regional meeting of an organization where I was involved. The head of my chapter was determined to get the ideas and views of our group in front of the regional board. We had some new ideas for raising funds and increasing volunteers. But instead of waiting her turn and listening to others' points, she turned every topic of conversation back to our ideas.

It went from bad to worse when she started shouting her points. People were resistant, so she grew even more aggressive and defensive. We could see the meeting leaders had had it with her. How did they deal with it? They decided to ignore her. My chapter members and I hung our heads in shame as our crazed leader interrupted every single person who spoke. Needless to say, our ideas weren't included in the plan that came out of that meeting.

Here are some tips for making sure you get your ideas heard in a positive way:

- **Prepare!** It sounds simple, but preparation is essential to ensuring meeting success. Before the meeting, write out your talking points. Think of who is in your audience.



- **Practice** explaining your ideas and opinions. You never say it perfectly the first time. Think it through and practice out loud. That way you say it the way you mean to say it.
- **Anticipate** possible questions or debates to your topic. Write down questions you think might come up when you bring up your points, and brainstorm about what your answers could be.
- **Pay attention** to your body language. Do you come across as open, non-threatening and interested in others? Do they see you as energetic and confident? Hunching over or crossing your arms conveys a sense of insecurity, and if people think you're insecure, they won't trust what you're saying. Sit up straight, use appropriate hand gestures, and, of course, smile!
- **Don't interrupt.** It's easy to cross the fine line between jumping into a conversation and straight out interrupting someone. Anticipate breaks and where you can jump in with your ideas.
- **Know the people** in your organization and get a sense of their communication styles. Use that to your advantage in meetings. Meeting savvy participation is not just about what you say; it's about how you listen and thoughtfully respond to others. People who are very successful in business learn early on that they will be rewarded for being prepared and becoming a contributor. This takes preparation and practice.

Think of meeting rooms not as a jail, but as your "stage" and play your part well. As the calendar changes and meetings are scheduled, challenge yourself to come in better prepared and ready to contribute big ideas.

How do you know you're successful? When people stop to hear what you have to say; you don't fight for floor time, but they instead ask your opinion. Making that your goal will help you not only to stay on track, but measure your success as an important contributor in your organization.