

How to Speak Up When You Can't Find the Words

Laleh Hancock

For many of us, the hesitancy to speak up has often been influenced by our taught notions about communication. To varying degrees, we have learned to hold back our true thoughts for fear of the consequences of what we might say – whether that is offending or dishonoring someone, or being seen as stupid, rude, or unkind. At work, we may be afraid of receiving ridicule, admonishment or rejection for highlighting issues, sharing ideas, or asking too many questions.

Staying silent can actually stop you, your business, organization or team from progressing, as well as undermine your personal and professional relationships. So how can you begin to speak up and create a greater impact in your life and of those around you?

Eliminate the fears, doubts and other distracting thoughts

When you have fears or doubts about speaking up, what are they really? The only time we fear something is when we don't have all the information and we think we are going to be caught off guard. Rather than seek clarity, we'll allow our head to start spinning through all the worst-case scenarios, or maybe even talk to someone who adds their fears and worst-case scenarios, compounding our own.

Any fears, doubts and stories we tell ourselves to stop us from speaking up are what I call "distractors" because they distract you from what is actually possible and available. They divert you from your ability to ask questions, seek

information, share ideas and take actions that would contribute to those around you.

Start recognizing the distractors when they present themselves (whether they are your thoughts or fears, or someone else's) and take charge to change them. Look at things from a different point of view. Rather than tell yourself all the scenarios of why you shouldn't speak up, ask yourself: "If I were not worrying about _____ what would I choose here? What do I know that could contribute here?"

Don't try to find the perfect thing to say

Nothing gets you tongue-tied more than getting stuck trying finding the right thing to say, at the right time, in the right way. There truly is no such thing as the perfect words and the perfect result. What if speaking up was about what you could add to the conversation to change things, or open more doors? What if it's not about having the best idea, or the answer to all the problems. Trying to be perfect keeps you stuck trying to find a single perfect tactical maneuver, rather than allowing you to speak from adding to the overall picture.

Ask yourself: If I wasn't trying to get it right, what could I say that would create greater here? What questions could I ask or ideas could I contribute that would open the door to multiple opportunities? When you speak up as someone who is not trying to find the right answer and solution, but to contribute as a catalyst to help change or add more, you can speak more from curiosity of what can be possible, rather than trying to be perfect and correct with what you say.

Ask more questions

One of the biggest secrets of being a successful salesperson is knowing that 90% of the time, you don't want to be the one talking. You want to know what your clients and customers require, and be able to spin your product or service to show how it fits what they are looking for. When you can't find the words, what if you asked more questions?

If you don't know what questions to ask, start with: "What questions can I ask that will get this client/customer/team/colleague to share their requirements with me?" Most people already know what they want to hear, and if you ask them questions (and listen to what they say) they will tell you what is important to them. Then you will have more information about what you can say that will provide them with what's needed.

Acknowledge the gift of silence

How often have you been silent and observed the people around you? There's information you gain by being aware of body language, tones and attitudes, and noticing what kind of interactions people respond and don't respond well to. It gives you more information. Just like with poker, not showing all your cards (or saying the first thing that comes into your head) can actually be an excellent strategy.

If you are willing to be silent, most people will need to start talking as they don't want that gap of silence, and they'll give you information and insight into what they might require to hear from you. Rather than judge silence as a problem or something you shouldn't be doing, what would change if you recognized it as an ability and skill you can use to your advantage?

Ask: How can I use both silence and speaking up to my

advantage?

Speaking up becomes easier when you are willing to communicate without judgment of you, or of anyone else. Don't deter yourself with fabricated fears, doubts, or pressures to be perfect. Observe, listen, ask questions, and you will be able to find the words and talk effectively and authentically to create greater for everyone involved.



About the Author: Laleh Alemzadeh-Hancock is a life and communication coach, management and professional services consultant, and facilitator of several Access Consciousness® special programs including Right Voice for You and Being You. Laleh has inspired and empowered hundreds of thousands of individuals and families including Fortune 500 executives, government agencies, non-profit organizations, athletes and veterans. A lifelong entrepreneur and passionate change-agent, Laleh strives to seek out possibility in every problem and aims to facilitate strategic change and optimal growth for all her clients. Through her organization, Global Wellness for All, Laleh inspires individuals to create wellness in all areas of their life and seek greater success. Follow Laleh on Instagram and Facebook.