

Speak Up and Be Heard in Business Meetings

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Most of us have been in meetings where discussion is dominated by two or three people. They're comfortable and confident and say anything that comes to mind.

You're taking great notes, thinking about the remarks others are making, analyzing ... but not contributing.

While you don't want to be the loudmouth, it's important that you speak up. You're in that meeting for a reason. Whether it's your experience, unique knowledge, historical viewpoint, or fresh perspective, meetings are more effective if everyone is involved and contributing.

Here are nine suggestions to get you started:

1. **Review the agenda and prepare to address**

something. Before the meeting, scan the agenda and choose a topic that is important to you and think about your viewpoint. Giving this some thought before the meeting will help you feel prepared, suggests Joel Garfinkle, executive coach. Write down your points so you remember them.

2. **Stop censoring yourself.** Garfinkle also suggests that you share your thoughts and ideas without over-editing them. At least once per meeting, practice by saying the thing that pops into your mind, so you get comfortable joining in. Don't hesitate.

3. **Belly breathe.** Jean Palmer Heck of Real Impact Inc. offers this public speaking tip: "Inhale deeply and then project your voice by speaking from the diaphragm." This is particularly helpful if you're nervous. It keeps your voice from sounding shaky.

4. **Ask questions.** Use your knowledge and experience to ask for clarification on someone else's ideas or comments.

5. **Practice by making one or two inconsequential comments.** Sometimes just agreeing or supporting someone else's comments with your own observations is a good way to speak up. These remarks can add to the flow of the meeting: "I agree with what Jane said and had this same





experience.”

6. **Be succinct.** Make your point clearly by keeping it brief. If you have a complicated point, let people know up front: “There are 3 reasons I don’t think this will work ... first ...” This tactic will help keep people from interrupting you.
7. **Decide how often you want to speak.** Whether it’s once or three times, setting this goal will motivate you to participate. Maybe include something you’ve planned in advance, a question, and one idea that just pops into your head.
8. **Don’t defer to someone else or assume their ideas carry more weight.** If you’re intimidated by someone in the room, it’s easy to defer by saying something like, “I think this, but Mr. Jones has much more experience in this area, so maybe we should ask him.” Your perspective is just as valid as anyone else’s. Your thoughts or disagreement are important when helping to flush out the best decisions.
9. **Speak up first.** When you express your viewpoint first, you’re less likely to start doubting yourself. If you wait, it’s often hard to break into the discussion.

The more you speak up in meetings, the easier it gets. Your unique perspective matters when it comes to getting things done and making sound decisions.