

Speaking Effectively

Note: Some of these comments relate to group settings; many apply to almost all conversations. The way to use this list is to find something that makes sense to you that is either present and not helpful or missing and would be helpful if you added it.

What image would you like to portray?

- Presence is about poise, attention, listening, and clarity of speaking.
- People are assessing you in these terms: sincere, believable, likable, credible, honest, knowledgeable, informative, approachable.
- If you don't connect with me, I won't be on your side.

Consider where you want to put your attention

- Achieving outcomes or agenda
- Looking for ways to help the process
- Working in a way that develops relationship
- Creating learning
- Achieving clarity and understanding
- Establishing safety and permission
- Being authentic and candid
- Completing conversations
- Exchanging commitments
- What is your key message? Always know what it is.

Think about the audience

- Is there an authentic way to get them participating and contributing to you and the conversation?
- While communicating, study the audience and adjust accordingly—if appropriate.
- Give some thought to how they were invited to this meeting or conversation.
- People comprehend at different speeds.
- People are inclined to hear what they want to hear. Communicate so they hear exactly what you want them to hear.
- Let people know they can ask questions and push back. Then be gracious when they do.
- Whenever possible, use names and personalize your relationships.
- Refer back to comments that people made earlier in conversations.
- Let people know when they've changed your thinking or contributed to you.
- Use words that will involve the audience.
- Then read their facial expressions and physical gestures to get clues about whether they are following and engaged.
- Move around the audience. Don't play favorites. Talk to each person as an individual. One minute goes a long way with most people.

Watch your speaking

- People are looking at the clarity of your mind and making an assessment about your competency. You don't get to be unclear. You don't get to be tentative.
- Resist speaking too quickly. Go slowly. Take your time.
- Speak up.
- Tone of voice is critical. Maintain the right tone.
- Use organizing techniques such as: "There are three points..."
- End on a strong note. Don't drop your voice with the last word of each sentence or thought. Sometimes the last word or thought is the key to your statement, and if you lose it, you lose your entire point.
- Don't discount your speaking in any way when you begin.
- Don't introduce extraneous thoughts or shift from one point to another.
- Speak concisely. Think about making each sentence count.
- Be careful of indirect language where facts or assumptions are unexpressed.
- End on a powerful note. Bring some closure.

Speak efficiently

- Going on and on can diminish your effectiveness.
- Do not provide examples unless asked for.
- Do not provide detail that isn't necessary.
- Watch out for side excursions or tangents from your main point.
- Practice making your point in 15 seconds.
- Only speak if what you have to say adds value to the conversation.
- Don't repeat what someone else has said.
- Don't make your point more than once.
- Be clear, concise, and relevant to the topic.
- Save the scenic route for the campfire.

Watch your words

- Avoid repeating your favorite words.
- Don't exaggerate. Let the facts speak for themselves.
- Don't be tempted to make broad, sweeping statements.
- Don't use absolute language like always and never.
- Choose words that have a single meaning to prevent misunderstanding.
- Don't use thoughtless, trite expressions such as, "To be truthful," "Honestly speaking," "To be honest," "All kidding aside," "Let me make one thing perfectly clear."
- Be selective in the use of nonspecific words such as: it, they, we, etc.
- Use active, convincing words and phrases.
- Be sure each word contributes to the substance or the spirit of the message.

Watch your non-verbals

- Don't fidget.
- Don't give people anything they can count. Avoid distracting behaviors.
- Don't scowl or do something that can be taken the wrong way.
- Look at someone directly for ten seconds as you begin speaking.
- Don't nod when you are listening—it appears as if you are not in control.
- Lean forward or toward the speaker when you are listening.
- Be very attentive when you are not speaking. Don't create an impression that you are not interested or engaged or listening.
- Make sure your tone matches your message.
- Make sure your non-verbals match your message.

Find places to demonstrate powerful listening

- If you don't develop a reputation as a wonderful listener, your speaking will get discounted.
- Pay attention when each person speaks. That extra attention to the listening process conveys genuine interest that, in turn, encourages the presenter to share even more than may have been intended.
- Let everyone finish without interruption.
- Say something that allows people to feel complete after they speak.
- Talking tends to lead to more talking, while listening tends to lead to more listening.
- The degree of attention you devote to listening directly impacts the quality of what you receive, retain, and understand.
- To accurately interpret what is said requires listening to the words, sounds, and vocal tones and observing facial expressions and physical gestures. Relying merely on the spoken words, rather than on how they are delivered and the nonverbal cues accompanying them, gives you only part of the total picture.

Consider what causes people to disconnect from the person speaking

- Coming across as aloof, distant, or arrogant—not likeable.
- Trying to prove or convince or persuade or sell.
- Trying to explain when no one asked for an explanation appears defensive.
- Being dismissive leads people to believe the speaker thinks he or she is brighter than they are.
- Conning, lying, or snowing.
- Using language that is not your language.
- Presenting material that is no longer timely or relevant.
- Using humor that takes away from the conversation or participants

Note: Much of the above content comes from my work with Charles Graves, a wonderful consultant who specializes on interactions with media or large audiences.