

STRAIGHT TALKING

Speaking frankly and directly can be challenging for a woman. Not because they can't do it but because a straight-talking woman challenges the perceptions of how a woman should be.



STEPPING UP

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It has been noted that women overuse terms such as "I'm sorry" and "just", they turn statements into questions (they use "upspeak" to make their statements sound like questions) and they soften statements. Some have concluded that we do this so that we seem kind, soft, self-deprecating, and not aggressive and overconfident, just as a woman is expected to be.

However, not all women are like this and in some situations, it is simply not appropriate to be so modest. It diminishes the speaker's power.

Personally, I like the gentler type of conversation be it from men or women, I like friendly emails and a few connector words help me make sense of tone and meaning.

There are times, however, when we all need to speak our mind clearly, quickly and with confidence. This is especially true for women in leadership positions.

So how can women do this without causing insult to others, even when men seem to be able to do it with no such consequence?

Tips

- Use facts and evidence to support your point of view
- Relate to the purpose and use words relevant to the topic under discussion
- Remain calm
- Speak slowly—try stretching the vowels on content words to slow your speech, e.g., try stretching the vowel sounds for these:
 - * I believe that we should change our direction
 - * The new strategy isn't working. I have evidence
- Retain the energy in your voice by varying your inflections
- Use eye contact to hold people's attention
- Listen to responses and be open to alternate points of view
- Be courteous
- Physically claim the space



Use this checklist to critique your presentation/conversation style in more formal situations:

Element	What?	How?	Why?
Eye contact	Involves everyone	Sustained	Shows interest
Facial expression	A range of emotions	Natural smile	Shows confidence
Body language	Centred, claiming the space	Complete whole movements	Indicates energy and enthusiasm
Gesture	Expressive hands	Open movement from shoulders	Controlled and empathic
Voice projection	Sustained air flow	Relaxed voice	Audible
Inflection	Appropriate to topic	New information signposted with a lift	Engaging
Speed	Timing appropriate to topic	Pausing for effect	Interesting to listen to
Main message	Clear	Reinforced with evidence	Credibility
Language	Emphatic	Conceptual words	Clarity
Listening	Active	Responsive to cues	Clarifying, engaging
Accepting questions	Taking time to consider	Directing to all	Genuinely interested
Responding to questions	Signposting for listeners	Reframing	Generous
Demeanour	Courteous	Non emotional language and tone	Assertive