

SmartBlog on Leadership

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One simple technique to appear more competent at work

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on July 16th, 2012

People make constant judgments about you based on their perceptions and observations. These perceptions can be hard to change, but both experience and research have shown that there is one simple thing you can do to start changing minds almost immediately: Speak up and let your opinions be heard.

According to a study by Cameron Anderson and Gavin J. Kilduff, people who speak up and act dominant are perceived by others as being competent — even if they aren't.

Speaking up is no substitute for true competence, of course. You can “fake it 'til you make it,” but if you lack the skills and traits needed to perform at your job, someone will eventually notice. If you really are competent, though, speaking up will help everyone else see you as the valuable employee you are.

Unfortunately, for many, speaking up isn't easy; this is usually due to a lack of confidence. If you're like most people, you may be afraid that people will laugh at your ideas or just ignore them completely. Maybe you don't think you have enough experience to be taken seriously. Or are you afraid that your boss or co-workers will think less of you if you share your opinion?

Whatever your reason for not speaking up at work, the good news is that once you start sharing your opinions and ideas, it is unlikely that any of these negative outcomes will happen. Instead, people will look to you as someone who has knowledge and opinions that are worth listening to.

So it's time to stop worrying and start talking. Stop being fearful and trust yourself. You were hired because someone thought you had something valuable to contribute so have the confidence in yourself to speak up and share your ideas.

Here are a few tips to help you speak up, speak first, and speak often:

1. **Realize you don't need to have the perfect solution.** Your idea doesn't have to be the best one. You don't even need to be right. You just need to be heard. As Julie Daum of Spencer Stuart says, “People write off people who don't speak. If you don't take up a little bit of airtime, people will assume you have nothing to contribute.”
2. **Don't overthink what you're going to say.** Many times, people try to refine their statements in their heads and end up missing the chance to say what they wanted to say. Don't worry about saying it the perfect way; just say it.
3. **You don't always have to be first.** Just because someone else has already expressed the same idea doesn't mean you can't speak up. If a co-worker beats you to the punch, you can still voice your support for the idea. If you normally find it hard to jump into a conversation, this can even give you an easy opening: “I agree with Jim because ...” Once you have the floor, elaborate and share your personal insights.
4. **Speak up when you disagree.** It's even more important to speak up at work when your opinion differs from the majority. Conflicting viewpoints add depth to a discussion and help spark new and better ideas that take all sides of the issue into consideration.

Meetings and conference calls provide the perfect opportunity to start speaking up at work. You have experience and expertise on topics related to your job, and it is critical that you share them whenever the opportunity arises. Your unique point of view provides valuable information that your company executives need to make sound decisions.

Make it a point to speak up at least once during each meeting. Not only will it make you appear more competent, it will get easier the more often you do it. And best of all, your confidence will soar.

Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 coaches in the U.S., having worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Oracle, Google, Amazon, Deloitte, The Ritz-Carlton, Gap and Starbucks. He is the author of seven books, including [“Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level.”](#) View his books and free articles at [Garfinkle Executive Coaching](#). Subscribe to his [leadership-development newsletter](#) and receive e-book “40 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!” for free.