

SmartBlog on Leadership

Engage. Innovate. Discuss.

Do I dare say something? How to be assertive at work

By [Joel Garfinkle](#)

Do you freeze up every time you have to communicate your ideas to people in positions of power? Do you clam up at meetings because you're afraid of saying the wrong thing?

We all have times when we'd prefer to be low key. But if this is a pattern is getting in the way of upward mobility, you need to take corrective action. You can shift your thinking from problem to opportunity if you follow these three steps.

Surface your fears

If you have self-doubts about your own personal style or impact, your subconscious self-talk is getting in the way of your executive presence and directly affecting your success. To move ahead, you need to be seen and heard by people at all levels of the organization. Your fears will come through in your voice and your power will disappear.

Use this handy tool to flip those feelings from negative to positive. Make a two-column table and list all your fears and negative feelings in the left column. Then turn each of those into a positive I-statement.

Negative and fearful	Positive and confident
I am afraid he/she will be disappointed in me.	I can speak confidently about the results I have produced.
I am afraid I have overpromised what I am capable of.	I have a track record of success that I can build on.
I am not doing as good a job as Joe-Sally-Jim-Nicole.	I don't have to compete with others; I just have to be my best self.

Once you have the evidence, act like a lawyer who has to prove his case to a jury. Just like a lawyer, spend time proving to yourself that all the stuff in the left-hand column isn't true. Instead, make an even stronger argument for why the right-hand side is more true than the left.

Most people are experts on negativity and fear, having spent most of their lives perfecting the left-hand column. When you can convince yourself that the right-hand side is true, things will start to change. But beware — when it does, the left-hand side will get even louder. Don't let it back in. Stay focused on the right-hand side. Give it all the energy it deserves.

Be prepared

Meetings with those in power have tremendous impact on how people perceive you. So, you must prepare for every meeting. When you're not prepared, you don't own it, and this directly affects your performance. Before the meeting, do two things:

1. Write down the key points you want to make.
2. Ask a trusted friend or colleague for feedback. "Here's my game plan. Is this high-level enough? Am I giving them what they need to know?"

After the meeting, evaluate your own performance. Take note of how you were perceived. Ask others who attended the meeting for feedback if that's appropriate and available.

Act like an owner

Break out of the pack by acting like a top executive — not with bragging or arrogance but with confidence. Your ideas have value. Your results contribute to the company's success. You belong.

Writing in the July/August 2011 issue of *Industrial Management*, D. Keith Denton said:

"Building a good reputation as a competent, capable professional who is primarily interested in the good of the organization rather than gaining personal power helps create a solid base. Successful leaders use this power to focus on the welfare of the organization and to promote their own reputation. Don't squander power and trust by doing the wrong thing."

Your communication should come from a strategic, big picture level. Don't get lost in the details. Switch roles in your mind — what does the high-level executive need or want to know? What's important to them and to the company?

Are you perceived differently when you are making a client presentation and you are even better prepared? You can do the same thing internally. If clients don't perceive you as powerful, your business will fail. If the top executives in your company don't perceive you as powerful, your career will fail. But if you convey personal power and executive presence, the fear will disappear, and you'll build the solid reputation you deserve.

Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 executive coaches in America. He has written seven books, including "**Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level.**" More than 10,000 people subscribe to his *Fulfillment@Work* newsletter. If you **sign up**, you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"