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## How to talk on the phone with confidence

In business, portraying an air of confidence is 75% of the path to success. People naturally gravitate towards others that seem sure of themselves and their product. To help you sound more confident when communicating with clients or customers, we've put together a list of five great tips to portray that air during phone conversations. RELATED: Cold Calling Is Not Dead: How We Built 1.1m In Pipeline Using The Phone In this article: Sound More Confident on the Phone: 5 Tips When you're talking on the phone, you should know what you're going to say and state it authoritatively. Doing so will help you accomplish two important things. When you can, make your questions into statements. Instead of asking, "So what do you want to do about this situation?" try stating that "So I'm wondering what you want to do about this situation." It's a small change, but it makes you sound a lot more confident and commanding. Many people have a habit of using a rising intonation at the end of many of their sentences, also known as "upspeak." It's perfectly fine for questions (sentences that would be punctuated with a "?"), but it should never be used for statements if you are trying to sound confident. Upspeaking during statements can make your tone sound more inviting and less formal, which might be a useful tool during friendly exchanges. It also discourages interruption and seeks reassurance. In business, though, it is definitely a no-no. Using "um," "uh," "y' know," "well," and other filler phrases kill your credibility. Whether your listener is aware of it or not, they will think of you as nervous and ineloquent. Going over what you're going to say over and over again will drill it into your mind, so you won't have to trip over your words with filler. Make your audience believe you are an expert in everything you talk about. Be prepared with statistics and anecdotal evidence that back up each of your points. If you always have something else to say on deck, you'll never feel unconfident. RELATED: Sales Tip — Confidence vs. Intellectual Laziness Studies show that people can hear a speaker's expression in their voice. If you are smiling while you say a phrase, for example, it will sound distinctly different than if you say the same phrase through a frown. This is true even if you are trying to use the same intonation. And people respond much better to a speaker who is smiling. They feel a happy orator is more confident and trustworthy. The point is, you should try to smile while speaking on the phone. It will inspire trust and confidence, and it will make you feel better about the message you're delivering too. People who leave space between their words come off as more confident in the message. Spacing out your words allows your audience time to digest them, and it conveys that you have taken the time to deliberate over each one. People with deeper voices are also seen as more confident-sounding. This one is a bit harder to control than slowing down your speech, but try to avoid pitching your voice up into the higher registers, power pose for maximum confidence, although you might feel a bit silly posing like a superhero during a business call. Good posture will also help with the depth and clarity of your voice. As we noted above, a strong voice is another key to sound more confident. Whether in a social situation or business, confidence is king. It makes everyone gravitate towards you if you get it right, and learning how to exude confidence over the phone is a huge step in that direction. DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER TIPS THAT HELP YOU IN SOUNDING MORE CONFIDENT OVER THE PHONE? LET US KNOW IN THE COMMENTS SECTION BELOW! Up Next: So many employees today favor email over phone for any work-related communication. Why? Some simply prefer the convenience of electronic messaging; for others, it's a matter of time management (typing a message and clicking 'send' often takes less time than calling a person and having a conversation); and then there are those who don't like the sound of their own voice. But as it turns out, the number one culprit is a fear of speaking, which includes shyness, nervousness, and anxiety, says Darlene Price, president of Well Said, Inc. and author of Well Said! Presentations and Conversations That Get Results (AMACOM). "The fear, uncertainty, and doubt of what to say and how to say it prevents many would-be callers from smiling and dialing," she says. "Unlike texting or emailing where you have the luxury of editing and proofing your words, speaking over the phone is live in real-time. Once you've said something, there's no taking it back. What's more, you can't even see the people to whom you're talking or gauge their reactions to your message. Whether you fear tripping over your words, forgetting your key points, or saying the wrong thing, talking over the phone can be scary." But it's still necessary in most lines of work—and employees need to know how to speak with impact on the phone. "If you're a business professional, this is imperative for several reasons," Price says. "If you're not already presenting regularly over the phone, there's a good chance you will eventually have to as you rise through the ranks. Also, more and more job interviews and business meetings are conducted by phone because it's easier, faster, and cheaper for everyone involved." Another reason: You never get a second chance to make a great first impression. A telephone call is often the first encounter between two people, especially in job interviews and sales. "The first 10 to 15 seconds of that phone call can make or break your chances of getting the outcome you desire," she says. "Regardless of how smart, experienced, or well-educated you may be, callers form critical opinions based primarily on the combination of your words and voice tone: What you say and how you say it. Because they cannot see you over the telephone, the impact of your voice conveys the crux of your message and creates a lasting impression with them." Finally—and perhaps most importantly—speaking with impact over the phone often leads to career advancement, she says. "Ralph Waldo Emerson said 'Speech is power.' With your speech, you are able to influence others for the good, whether it's to hire you, fund your project, buy your product, adopt your proposal, approve your budget, or support your cause." These opportunities to speak with power are happening more and more over the phone. Unless you speak up with impact, others will not know the value you bring to the table. In Pictures: 12 Tips For Better Telephone Meetings Price says that in business, the most common mistake when talking on the phone relates to voice tone. "A voice tone that is monotone, impolite, distracted, or unprofessional in any way sends an immediate negative message. Over the phone, your voice—more than any other element—conveys your emotional attitude toward the caller, so it's critically important to send the right message through your voice." Multitasking is another common mistake, she says. "Since listeners cannot see you, it's tempting to covertly catch up on other tasks while attempting to carry on a telephone meeting. Not only are you likely to miss critical points in the conversation, the listeners can hear awkward pauses and a tone of distraction in your voice." Another big blunder: The use of discrediting speech. For example, the repetitive use of filler words and phrases including "um," "uh," "er," "like," "sort of," "you know." Other habits that jeopardize speech clarity and credibility are talking too fast, talking too much, interrupting, failing to listen attentively, and not properly preparing for the call. But the good news is, it only takes a few simple techniques to turn a potentially bad telephone call into a productive meeting with tangible results and measurable outcomes. Here are 12 tips for optimizing meetings over the phone: Prepare for the meeting and rehearse your opening remarks. In advance, set a clear agenda and distribute it to participants, Price suggests. "Include the objective, attendee names, location, start and end times, the list of topics to be covered, and outcomes or actions desired. Then, to ensure a confident enthusiastic start to the meeting, practice aloud the voice tone and content of your opening." Assign a leader. Every meeting needs a leader, she says. "If you're not the leader of the call, be sure to assign the task to a qualified candidate." The leader opens the call on time, manages the topics and time, facilitates discussion, fields Q&A, reviews next steps and closes on time. Use a clear, pleasant tone of voice with plenty of volume and good enunciation. When you're speaking on the phone, your voice is the primary communication vehicle. Therefore, speaking loudly enough to be heard and in a friendly engaging manner is critically important, Price says. "To evaluate your voice, try recording your side of a telephone conversation. Afterward, listen to the recording. Do you sound happy or annoyed? Enthusiastic or bored? Helpful or impatient? Self-assured or timid? Are you mumbling or speaking distinctly?" State the specific purpose of the telephone meeting. After the greeting and welcome, immediately state the reason for the call, the objectives, and a brief preview of the points to be covered. This provides focus and direction. It also shows you're prepared, in charge, and committed to a successful meeting that yields outcomes, she says. Use good body language. Price explains that even though listeners cannot see you physically, they can hear the confidence created through good posture. "Sit up straight as if you were actually in the meeting face-to-face. Also try standing up when you speak to project an even more commanding confident voice tone. Gesture as you would in conversation and imagine you are making eye contact with the callers. And remember to smile—the listener can actually hear the grin in your voice." Listen actively and avoid interrupting. Indicate your attentiveness by using "verbal nods," which include phrases such as "That's interesting," "Oh, really," "Uh-huh," "Good," "I see," "Please go on," "Yes, I understand," and "Could you please say more about..." Take notes and keep track of who says what, Price suggests. "Be patient with other speakers and don't butt-in or jump to conclusions. Then, make reflective statements and ask questions to verify and clarify what you hear." Ensure a quiet environment and avoid multitasking. To optimize concentration and minimize disruptions, close your door (if you have an office) or arrange to meet in a quiet place with no background noise. Turn off or silence any electronic devices that may sound. "Give your callers the full attention you would if you were face-to-face with them." Avoid speakerphones when possible. Ideally, speak directly into the telephone receiver or use a high-quality headset, Price says. Avoid cradling the receiver between your ear and shoulder. This usually gives a muffled sound and strains your neck. If using a speakerphone is absolutely necessary, make sure you place it as close as possible to the speaker(s) and urge everyone to speak up so the callers can hear all comments. "The main point is to ensure good sound quality. A poorly placed receiver, too much distance from the speakerphone, or a bad connection can ruin a call. At the start of the call, confirm with listeners that you have a good connection and that everyone can hear clearly." If you must place someone on hold, ask for permission and explain the reason. "It's impolite to place someone on hold abruptly without telling them why," she says. "Also, never leave someone holding for more than 15 or 20 seconds without offering to call them back." Choose your words carefully. When you're speaking over the phone instead of in person, words themselves carry a greater impact because the listener does not have your nonverbal cues to provide meaning. That's why it's especially important to prepare and rehearse your speaking points ahead of time, Price says. "Also, avoid ambiguity, slang, slurs and jargon. Keep your language and tone positive, inviting, and upbeat." Identify yourself before you speak and instruct others to do the same. "Avoid guessing games," she says. "Don't assume that everyone will recognize your voice. Identify yourself every time you speak—or at least the first three or four times until your voice is established and easily recognized." Likewise, encourage all callers to identify themselves. If someone speaks without identifying himself, repeat the point by asking, "Who's the speaker please?" Direct questions and comments to others by name. When you're face-to-face, you can use your eyes and body language to cue a specific person to respond to your question or comment, Price says. But when you're on a conference call, address the person by name. "Also, if you want a response to the last thing you've said, avoid asking, 'Are there any comments?' Instead, direct certain individuals to respond in sequence: 'Jeff and Alice, I know you have a lot of experience in this area. Jeff, let's start with your ideas.'" From a company's perspective, the primary consequences of a 'bad' telephone meeting are a loss of time, money, and productivity, Price concludes. From an individual perspective, if you happen to be the host of a 'bad' telephone meeting, your reputation as a leader and manager may be jeopardized. "Every employee has a responsibility to be a good steward of their employer's time and money—this begins with planning and conducting meetings that yield measurable results for your co-workers and the company." In Pictures: 12 Tips For Better Telephone Meetings - Follow me on Twitter, Forbes, and Google+.



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