

Ban These Words From Your Vocabulary To Sound More Confident At Work



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If you have great ideas, you need to know how to communicate them. At work as in relationships, it all starts with conveying confidence. But a challenge many high-achieving women run up against are bad speech habits that have been conditioned in us over the years. Without us even knowing it, these verbal crutches can damage our internal and projected confidence levels and can even negatively impact how we're perceived at work.



Source: kaboompics

Women's brains are naturally tuned for emotional intelligence and specialized for masterful communication. The female mind is hardwired to pick up nuances in spoken language and non-verbals like facial expressions, tone voice and body language, which is why many women are so adept at forming interpersonal connections. It also means that women in particular are more likely to behave in such a way to preserve relationships, which in spoken communication may sometimes be misconstrued to convey a lack of authority and low confidence.

The good news is that you can rewire conditioned language habits to both sound and feel more confident. It's not about "talking like a man" or adapting an aggressive style. It's about tapping into your inner courage and channeling it for more confident communication.

Are you putting yourself at a disadvantage due to your speech habits? Be on the lookout for any of the following cropping up in your vocabulary, and learn how to kick them.

7 Words and Phrases to Ban from Your Vocabulary for More Confidence

"Just"

This word minimizes the power of your statements and can make you seem defensive or even apologetic. Saying, "I *just* wanted to check in," can be code for, "Sorry for taking up your time" or "Sorry if I'm bugging you." It can often be a defense mechanism subconsciously used to shield ourselves from the rejection of hearing "no" or a way to avoid the discomfort of feeling like we're asking for too much.

How to Quit: Start by rereading your emails and texts. Scan your written communications for excess "just"s that sneak in. Delete them. Notice how much stronger and straightforward the statements sound. Then gradually shift to doing the same in real-time, spoken communication.

“I’m no expert, but…”

Women often preface their ideas with qualifiers such as, “I’m not sure what you think, but…” This speech habit typically crops up because we want to avoid sounding pushy or arrogant, or we fear being wrong. The problem is, using qualifiers can negate the credibility of your statements. We all sometimes offer opinions or observations that don’t go anywhere or prove to be incorrect. That’s the nature of being human, and it won’t cost you your job or reputation. Pointing out why you may be wrong before saying anything is a waste of your words.

How to Quit: If you know you’re prone to reflexively using qualifiers, breathe in for a count of three before speaking up in a meeting or on a phone call. This pause gives you time to think, rephrase your statement sans qualifier, giving your words a greater impact.

“I can’t”

When you say “I can’t,” you’re sacrificing ownership and control over your actions. “Can’t” is passive, whereas saying you “*won’t*” do something is active. It shows that you create your own boundaries. Saying “I can’t” conveys that you don’t have the *skill* to do something, but chances are what you’re really trying to say that you don’t *want* to do it. Throwing around “I can’t” connotes a fear of failure or lack of will in testing your limits. Your words shape your reality, so saying “I can’t” limits you and allows fear to win.

How to Quit: Increase ownership over what you say by replacing “I can’t” with “I won’t.” This is a subtle yet powerful way to demonstrate agency, independence, and control – especially in work environments where you may feel ordered around. While it might feel intimidating at first, it gives you a chance to assert your boundaries for a better work-life balance.

“What if we tried…?”

You’re more likely to be trusted and taken seriously when you straightforwardly state your ideas, rather than couch them as a question. Masking your opinions as questions invites rebuttal and can lead to you feel criticized. Stating an idea as a question when it’s not is equal to sacrificing ownership over the idea. It’s also a way of “polling,” which subconsciously speaks to the fact that you don’t think your own ideas are valuable, valid, or worthwhile unless everyone thinks so. This may tie back to the inner fear many women have of being “not good enough.”

How to Quit: Anytime you have a suggestion, present it as a statement rather than a question. “What if we tried targeting a new set of customers?” sounds much less certain than “I think we could target a new set of customers who will be more receptive to our sales efforts.” There are situations, like when brainstorming, where throwing out questions to a group is appropriate. Before you speak up, run your idea through your head first in the form of a question, and then as an “I think…” or “I believe…” statement. This makes a stronger case for the point you are trying to get across.

“That is like, so great!”

Talking like Shoshanna from *Girls* – using habits like uptalk or using “Valley girl” jargon – can distract your audience from what you’re saying. A common indicator of this “vocal fry” is raising your voice at the end of statements. This can indicate uncertainty, make you appear hesitant, and create a lack of trust among your audience. The solution isn’t to learn to talk like a man, but to find ways to communicate more clearly so that your language habits don’t detract from your message.

How to Quit: Try this technique called kinesthetic anchoring: hold one arm straight out in front of you. Begin reading aloud from a book or magazine. Whenever you reach a period, lower your arm down to your side, and drop your pitch at the same time. Your arm movement will trigger your voice to mimic its drop.

“Thanks! :)”

You don't need to use exclamation marks or emojis to express your enthusiasm about every little thing. The infusion of extra emotional cues into language touches on a core belief (or core insecurity) that we may be concerned about being perceived as kind, worthy, or likeable enough. It's preemptive “peace keeping”: we're trying to ensure our message has been positively received (a false guarantee that's entirely out of our control). Particularly in corporate environments, gushing over *how amazing* a product update is or how *omg totally thrilled* you are for a colleague can be inappropriate.

How to Quit: Instead of general “that's sooooo great!” statements, try to make more specific observations (“The new VP of Marketing sounds like she'll be a valuable addition to our team”) that shows your interest at a more professional level. For written communication such as emails, study the language senior people at your company use and tailor your “netiquette” to match theirs.

“Am I Making Sense?”

Until you asked that question, yes, you were. By periodically asking, “does that make sense?” or “am I explaining this alright?” you open up the possibility for your audience to wonder whether, in fact, you are. While you're probably doing this out of a belief that you're encouraging interaction and checking in on your own personal effectiveness, in fact it speaks to an underlying belief you may have that you're an impostor, and unqualified to be speaking on the matter.

How to Quit: If you want to check in on people's comprehension of what you're saying and open the floor for engagement, it's better to say, “I look forward to hearing your thoughts or questions.” This halts your impulse to take on responsibility for “fixing” situations and making sure everyone understands you, and communicates your conviction in your competence.

As much as you may have it all together in most ways at work, subtle language cues can often detract from people's perception of your confidence and professionalism. Observing these common pitfalls and how they might slip into your vocabulary can elevate the level of confidence in your speech.

Melody J. Wilding helps ambitious women and female entrepreneurs master their inner psychology for success and happiness. Learn more about better career and life balance at melodywilding.com.