

Speaking with Authority

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It's time to work on YOU. So, sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

In this lesson, we will look at why being able to speak with authority is so integral for leaders and how you can go about achieving this when addressing any audience – large or small.

Google "greatest speakers", and you'll see faces like Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King Jr. Yes, they were born with brilliance, but they could also convey their aims and ideas to those around them with authority and in a way that inspired people to follow them.

As a leader, you must be able to convey your messages with authority and confidence, whether addressing your team or speaking to a packed auditorium.

However, speaking with authority shouldn't mean speaking aggressively [1]. Nobody enjoys being intimidated, shouted at, or spoken to like a child.

Unsure of how you can speak with authority without sounding like an angry teacher? Don't fret; we have some tips for you.

Tip number one:

Have a plan [2]. Even the best public speakers will struggle if they find themselves addressing a large audience of eager faces with no plan for what they will say.

People will have different preferences, but whether it is a loose set of key points or a full script, always ensure you have *something* prepared.

Now that the prep is done, let us get onto the actual speaking.

Tip number two:

Always start by **taking ownership of the room** [3].

This one is a mental battle we all must fight at some point. Some people call it "impostor syndrome". It's where we do not believe we deserve to be the focus of attention or that we have anything of interest to say. Well, cut that thinking straight out!

As you're preparing to speak, repeat the mantra that "My message is valuable, and everyone here needs to hear what I have to say". Being confident and comfortable is infectious. If *you* believe you deserve to be there and that what you are about to say is important, so will your audience.

Tip number three:

Stand like a winner.

We don't want to shock you but speaking with authority isn't just about... well... speaking. Your physical presence is also significant. If you look nervous, fidgety, or are closing yourself off, you will undermine your authority and, ultimately, your message.

The champion stance is a way of standing that emanates authority. Position one foot in front of the other, place your weight on the back foot, hold your head up, drop your shoulders back, lean your torso slightly forward and smile.

Humans tend to hold an enormous amount of tension in our musculature. If you can acknowledge it, you can start to eliminate it. Shake out those limbs and focus on relaxing any taut muscles to have a more relaxed stance.

This will also help you keep open body language, which welcomes your audience and builds trust.

Tip number four:

Tailor your message to your audience.

When preparing to speak on a subject we know and care a lot about, we often focus too much on what we want to say and lose sight of the audience.

This is where having a clear plan of what you will say can come in handy. Take a look at it and ask yourself, "What does my audience actually need to hear?" "What level of expertise or knowledge do they already have on the topic?"

Suppose you are speaking to a group of coders about why the new app you have planned will revolutionise the world. In that case, you probably don't need to explain the basic terminology around apps and how they are built. Now envisage giving that same presentation to your board of directors who have never seen the backend of an app. It may make more sense to ease them into the topic and give them some basics.

Tip number four:

Get to the point!

Your greatest threat when speaking to a group is people's attention span. Overly wordy, rambling monologues that regularly wander off into tenuous anecdotes will not win you any followers.

Keep it concise. Stay on message. Break what you have to say into clear, digestible points, which you can then recap quickly at the end. Keep an eye on how your audience reacts to what you have to say.

Tip number five:

Our next piece of advice is to avoid clumsy 'filler' words [4].

We have all witnessed (and been responsible for) awkward presentations and speeches jam-packed with "umms", "ahs", and "uhs". These utterances come naturally to the average speaker as they try to gather their thoughts, remember a piece of data or grasp the answer to an unexpected question. However, as you speak with authority, you have no need for these weak, clumsy filler words. It is also good to avoid flimsy, non-committal sentences [5] that begin with "I think," "I believe", or "I just". Slowing down [6] is an excellent way to cut out these filler words. Have the confidence to speak a little slower and with more purpose, and you'll quickly ditch the "umms" and "ahs".

Tip number six:

Don't overcomplicate it.

When speaking to people, you want to be memorable [7]. It is much easier to remember a six-word sentence than a thirty-word one. Keep your sentences short and to the point.

Littering your speech with impressive-sounding long, multi-syllabic words and technical jargon can be tempting. If your audience needs an internet search engine and a dictionary to keep up with what you are telling them, it means they likely aren't taking it all in. What's more, they probably think you're egotistical.

Tip number seven:

This one might sound obvious. Don't swear.

Few people can get away with dropping curse words into their presentations. It's an unnecessary variable to throw into your speech when aiming to speak with authority and be taken seriously. You never know who in your audience isn't going to be a fan of that type of language – it just isn't worth taking the chance.

Tip number eight:

Tell a story!

A gripping story will always win over pie charts, data and slogans when holding a room's attention and connecting with people. Stories are how we relate to one another. Being able to tell an engaging story about any subject is the best way to bring your ideas and messages to life.

It can be imaginary or something from real life – whatever the topic, always look for how it can become an engrossing story that people want to hear right to the end.

Tip number nine:

Engage the power of pauses and silence.

Don't be afraid to put an idea out there, and then stay silent for a few moments as it settles in the minds of your audience. Take brief pauses after each sentence and slightly longer ones at the end of a paragraph, thought, or point.

Uncomfortable, unplanned silences where the speaker has lost their train of thought or given into their nerves clearly indicate uncertainty. However, a planned, controlled silence achieves the opposite. Intentional silence, where the speaker is entirely in control, displays authority and certainty. It can even add a sense of drama and pull your audience towards you as they wait for your next word.

It also allows you to breathe, which is essential to speaking well. Running out of breath as you rush to the end of a point is **not** a good look.

It is said that aiming for around 160 words a minute is a good pace.

Tip number ten:

Utilise your entire range of vocal tools.

We've already mentioned how important breathing is to control your pace. However, a full set of lungs also helps you have a stronger, fuller voice.

Christine Jahnke is a speech coach to important public figures such as Hilary Clinton and Michelle Obama. She speaks about the importance of avoiding a flat monotone, arguing that a varied pace and pitch when speaking is a great way to project power and incite interest.

To achieve control over your vocal delivery, you must also open wide. A constricted jaw and throat will limit the power and energy of your voice. Seek out some simple vocal and mouth-loosening exercises that you can make a habit of doing before

important presentations. You can also try yawning to relax your larynx and release body tension.

Tip number eleven is our final tip. It's the most obvious tip and the most effective.

Practice!

Practice speaking in public at every opportunity. At work. At home. Anywhere! Practice will help get rid of nerves. Exposure therapy is part of the most effective treatment currently available for anxiety, CBT. If you're terrified of giving speeches, the best way to increase your confidence is to do so speeches! It's also super helpful to aid you in developing your own style – seeing what works for you and what doesn't.

By taking on these tips and working on them, you will make significant gains in speaking with authority. Your challenge this week is to go and look for an opportunity to speak publicly. Put yourself out there and start challenging yourself!

That's all for today. Thanks for listening, and remember: keep building the best you.

[1] *How to Speak with Authority-7 Steps to Being Authoritative*, Ita M. Olsen (2021)
<https://conveyclearly.com/2021/01/11/how-to-speak-with-authority-7-steps-to-being-authoritative/>

[2] *8 Powerful Tips for Speaking With Confidence and Authority*, Australian Institute of Business (2016)
<https://www.aib.edu.au/blog/communication/8-powerful-tips-speaking-with-confidence-and-authority/>

[3] *How To Speak With Authority*, Jenna Goudreau (2011)
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jennagoudreau/2011/10/26/how-to-speak-with-authority-hillary-clinton-michelle-obama/?sh=53b7fb3c60fa>

[4] *8 Powerful Tips for Speaking With Confidence and Authority*, Australian Institute of Business (2016)
<https://www.aib.edu.au/blog/communication/8-powerful-tips-speaking-with-confidence-and-authority/>

[5] *5 Tips for Speaking with Authority and Confidence*, Nicolas Cole (2017)
<https://www.inc.com/nicolas-cole/5-tips-for-speaking-with-authority-and-confidence.html>

[6] *How To Speak With Authority And Impact*, Mary Hartley
<https://maryhartley.com/how-to-speak-with-authority-and-impact/>

[7] *Pitch perfect: how to speak with authority*, Rivkah Brown (2019)
<https://www.ft.com/content/8c3eff7a-7596-11e9-b0ec-7dff87b9a4a2>