

MISTAKES WOMEN MAKE AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

LESSON 1: COMMUNICATION MISTAKES

The three exercises in this Lesson will help you answer the question, am I unknowingly doing something through the way I communicate that might be taking me out of the game I want to play at work? Am I minimizing myself by the way I speak? Is there a way to use the power of my language to raise my professional profile? The answer is, YES, YES, and YES!

Use a notebook or journal to complete the exercises below and keep your reflections together throughout the Lesson below and the entire series.

EXERCISE 1: USING MINIMIZING LANGUAGE

Women often use words that minimize their own impact. What seems like a “no big deal word” can often send the subtle message that whatever you just said isn’t all that important. Practicing speaking without minimizing words will increase how you are perceived and is one of the best things you can do for yourself to raise your confidence and increase the power and impact behind the information you have to impart.

Identify one or two words or phrases you use often that might be reducing the power of your requests or ideas. Once you have them identified, ask a friend, family member, or colleague to count the number of times you use it/them. Do this for one week. The way I did this was each time I went into a meeting at work, I asked a colleague that I felt comfortable asking to help me to count. I said something like this, “I’m working on developing some new habits to increase my visibility and impact. Part of this personal project is reducing or eliminating using the words or phrase “just” and “a little bit” while I’m speaking. Would you be willing to help me? During this meeting, would you count the number of times I say these two things and at the end of the meeting, privately, let me know how many you counted”. Having accountability to someone else somehow raises our awareness even more and helps to change this bad habit. In addition, you can also ask your coach for assistance during a coaching session or a girlfriend or sister when speaking or hanging out with them as most likely your language follows you into your personal life as well.

STOP: Consider stopping here before going on to the next exercise as it’s difficult to work on too many things at one time and doing this one first will allow a stronger focus for you. However, feel free to load up on your practices and do more than one at a time if you prefer.

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EXERCISE 2: APOLOGIZING

Studies show men and women have very different ideas about what type of behavior actually constitutes an apology and what doesn't. When we apologize for things that do not really require an apology, it undermines what we're saying and sends the message we don't feel confident in what we're about to say or our right to say it. Let's look into this deeper.

PART ONE: Read [INC. ARTICLE](https://www.inc.com/deborah-grayson-riegel/stop-saying-im-sorry-in-your-presentations-do-this-instead.html?cid=search) on what's considered an apology worthy offense to understand how two simple words can kill your career. <https://www.inc.com/deborah-grayson-riegel/stop-saying-im-sorry-in-your-presentations-do-this-instead.html?cid=search>

PART TWO: Watch Amy Shumer's - [I'm Sorry video](https://vimeo.com/253499468) which sadly, but accurately, highlights what women do to minimize their experiences or discount their accomplishments. <https://vimeo.com/253499468>

PART THREE: Watch Professor Maja Jovanoic's [TedTalk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8sYv_6uyss) called **How Apologies Kill Our Confidence** in which she explains how apologies can be confidence killers. This is a worthwhile watch. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8sYv_6uyss

PART FOUR: Check to see just how many times you actually say, 'I'm sorry', start counting how many times in one day you say it or minimize your accomplishment in some way. The act of counting will help you become aware and reduce the number of occurrences. Ask someone to help you count like in the exercise in limiting the use of minimizing words in Mistake #1 which can be found in Lesson #1 in this Module. An accountability buddy is always a great idea to help keep us on track.

STOP: Consider focusing on these four above before going further.

EXERCISE 3: ASKING PERMISSION

Women are prone to asking for permission to say something when it's not necessary to do so. Asking permission creates a [sticky floor syndrome](https://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/12-ways-you-might-be-making-gender-bias-worse.html) (<https://www.inc.com/minda-zetlin/12-ways-you-might-be-making-gender-bias-worse.html>) and prevents women from raising their own bar or moving up the corporate ladder. Let's see if we can break this habit.

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Practice the four steps below at least once a day for a week - more if you are able. This practice will imbue some new habits into the way you behave as you learn to make more decisions for yourself and act with more agency. The result is you will be perceived as more confident, strong, and a person who gets things done. The way to do this is to get in the habit of asking *yourself* for permission, not others.

Step 1: Stop, catch yourself and notice that you're asking someone else for permission. As we know, awareness is the first step in making any change.

Step 2: Ask yourself what you need from this specific situation before seeking permission elsewhere. Then instead of asking for permission, ask for what you need instead.

Step 3: Ask yourself whether you need permission or are you instead wanting reassurance or approval, or second guessing your decisions by asking others their advice or approval?

Step 4: Start rephrasing. Change the words, "Would it be okay if...and instead say, "I will and I am." If you need a sounding board or a thought-partner, go get one. Instead of asking when it is not necessary, rephrase your ask so you're seen as a smart problem solver and decision maker. When we make more assured statements, we tend to act more self-assured and others perceive us this way.

STOP: Consider focusing on these before going further.

JOURNAL AND REFLECTIONS

Reflecting on what you learned from doing the exercises in this Lesson will give you more clarity about yourself and maybe even some next steps to implement. Journal your answers to the questions below. Journaling is more about writing stream of consciousness versus getting it right or making it sound pretty. Journaling is a process that unearths curiosity and wonder within us. After completing the exercises above, answer the following...

What top 3 observations do you have?

What patterns, if any, do you notice?

What specific things resonated most or seem right on target for you? And why?

What resonated least or seems less relevant for you? And why?

What are your biggest ahas or take-aways?

What did you learn about yourself that delighted you most?

What are 1-2 next steps you will take with this information you now have?

FOLLOW UP

If you want more help understanding what this all means and how it relates to where you are or where you're going, reach out to me at Wendy Capland, wcapland@visionquestconsulting.com to schedule a one hour 1:1 Coaching Session. Investment-\$500.