



# The Power of Language: Effective Assertive Communication for Everyone

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What is  
“Rhetoric?”

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Communication

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Oration

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*Persuasion*

Language IS  
Power

---

Shape perceptions

---

Establish hierarchies

---

Either empower or  
marginalize individuals or  
groups

**cold**

low

*expect*

*fear*

*dark*

fail

**demand**

avoid

excessive

*abrasive*

confident

joy

fearless warm

*communicate*

*strong*

capable

proud

# Powerful Language in Life Science Professions

Observable –  
what we can  
perceive,  
measure, or infer

Precise,  
constructive, and  
clear

Focus on what is  
present, not what  
is absent

Objective and  
verifiable

Clarity,  
collaboration,  
and progress

# Powerful Language in Data-Centric Professions

Identifying  
themes and  
trends

Framing what  
data reveals, not  
what it lacks

Ensuring clarity  
and objectivity

Actionable  
insights

Forward-  
thinking  
approach

# Defining Low Power Language

Linguistic patterns and behaviors that convey deference, uncertainty, or lack of assertiveness in communication.

Speech characteristics and behaviors that often position individuals as subordinate or less influential in conversations.



# Low Power Language in Action

Umm...a year or so ago, I presented a session about “Building Your Personal Brand as a Woman in Tech,” and I’m not sure, but I think I gave a successful presentation.

I figured I am sort of qualified to offer that seminar since I had given it before for my company. Maybe I am overestimating, but the feedback I got was positive. It might not have been the best, but it basically went over well, does that make sense? Anyway, sorry – I got sidetracked!

This leads me to my main point: Low power language distracts from our strengths!

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It might not have been the best, but it went over well, does that make sense?

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# Who said what?

- Of these two sentences, which one do you think was said by a man and which one was by a woman.
  - 1.It's obvious. We have to do X in order to achieve Y.
  - 2.I don't know if this is worth mentioning, it's just a thought I had. But maybe we should do X and Y might be achieved. It might not be the right time to bring it up but just thought I would say it in case it is useful.

# Low-Power Language

Hedging



Maybe  
Basically  
I think  
I feel like

Clarifying



Does that make sense?  
Do you know what I mean?  
Don't you think?

Qualifying



I may be wrong, but...  
I'm no expert...  
Correct me if...

Diminishing



I'm not sure I can  
I'm no good at  
I'm too nervous to...

# Hedging



So, basically, I think it would be great if you could maybe sort of stop using language with hedges.

- Introduces uncertainty
- Causes the hearer to lose confidence
- Allows the speaker to be dismissed

# Overcoming Hedging



Awareness

Apps like Voice Vibes And Orai



Substitution

Replace “I think” with “I know”



Use sparingly

One is fine, two is not



Inventory

Keep tabs on how often and how many

<https://www.bigtincan.com/features/conversation-intelligence/>

<https://orai.com/product/>

# Clarifying



I am clearer if I don't use clarifying tag questions. Does that make sense? Know what I mean?

- Lacks confidence
- Associates with youth (amirite?)
- Indicates need for reassurance

# Overcoming Clarifying



Reflect

Insecurity  
Fear of misunderstanding



Learn Your Triggers

Take mental notes (or  
physical ones)



Pause

Think before you speak



Embrace Silence

Slow and steady wins the  
race



# Qualifying



I know I'm not an expert in this, so don't take my word for it, because I probably should stop qualifying all of my statements.

- Undermines your credentials
- Denies expertise
- Limits capabilities

# Overcoming Qualifying



Commit

Speak early, not later



Ask questions

Inquire about the details before believing you can't



Nudge yourself

Challenge your own beliefs



Shift your mindset

The source of breakthrough

# Diminishing



I'm sorry, the meeting before this one ran late and you know how it is.

I just feel like actually this is a pretty good presentation.

- Negates your worth
- Takes focus away from your expertise
- Makes your point less credible

# Overcoming Diminishing



Engage

Eye contact and  
physical  
presence



Consider

Listen carefully  
and pause



Remember: SAR

Situation  
Action  
Result

# It's Not All Negative

Participant buy-in  
Agreement  
Opinion seeking  
Gratitude



Empathy  
Feedback  
Solidarity  
Consensus building

# A Recent Real-World Life Science Example

## **In Early-Phase Pancreatic Cancer Clinical Trial, Investigational mRNA Vaccine Induces Sustained Immune Activity in Small Patient Group**

- “continues to show potential”
- “The latest data from the phase 1 trial are encouraging”
- “patients with a vaccine-induced immune response had a reduced risk”
- “recent developments are changing the field”
- “new therapies are urgently needed”

# What's the fix?



Trim

- Trim the hedges

Avoid

- Avoid apologizing

List

- List your most common missteps

Keep

- Keep the focus on assertive, not aggressive (like ballroom dancing)

Questions?  
Comments?  
Connection!

SCAN ME

