6 Workplace Communication Mistakes to Avoid

By Colette Carlson

Strong communication skills at work are essential if you want to have your ideas heard or have co-workers who are comfortable sharing ideas with you.

Here are six common communication mistakes that people—especially professional women—make in the workplace, according to communications speaker and consultant Colette Carlson ...

Women and men receive different confidence "training" as kids, and it shows up in their adult communication styles. Women grow up less likely to ask for what they want and negotiate less often on their own behalf. They don't communicate that they're "ready" when clearly they are! But it doesn't have to always be that way.

• **Failing to speak up early in meetings.** Ideally, speak up in the first third of the meeting. The earlier you jump in, the more you're seen as a contributor.

• **Using phrases that signal a lack of confidence.** *Examples:* "I could be wrong ...," or, "I'm probably forgetting something ..." Such defensive phrases protect the speaker, says Carlson, "so that, if you don't like my idea, you'll still like me."

• **Adding "tag lines" to your statements.** *Examples:* "We'll send the contract on Friday ... *OK*?" or, "It would be better if we scheduled lunch before 1 p.m. ... *don't you agree*?" Tag lines make it sound as if you're asking for approval.

• **Over-apologizing.** *Example:* "I'm sorry, but I need to ask what business you have with Mr. Smith." Saying you're sorry implies fault and undermines your credibility.

• **Looking unprepared when entering a room.** *Example:* Fidgeting, making hurried movements, shifting your eyes from person to person. "The fewer movements you make," says Carlson, "the more people perceive you as prepared, confident and under control."

• **Deflecting praise.** Don't immediately shrug off praise or minimize it. That makes people think you don't deserve it. Instead, say: "Thank you. I worked really hard on that, and I appreciate your noticing." If you recognize praise, you'll hear more of it.

The Art of Subtle Communication

Put a new communication style into practice by using the "Three Times Rule."

"If you've tried something three times and are unsuccessful, give it up. But when I hear from admins that they tried something once and it didn't work, I challenge them to go back and try it again ... and again. It just might work."

"You'll also notice that I almost always drop my voice, when I really want you to hear something," says Colette.

Need to ask for something you need or give some difficult feedback? This is a tool. By keeping a neutral tone and low volume, Carlson says, she gives others a chance to hear what she's saying rather than get their hackles up. She asked rhetorically, "Because once people become defensive, are they listening to you anymore?"