

6 communication gaffes even smart people make

Here are six common communication mistakes that people—especially professional women—make in the workplace, according to communications consultant and Business Management Daily contributor, Colette Carlson:

- **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?"