

Why being interrupted is most likely your fault



Most people believe they get interrupted because that is simply how the interrupting person behaves. In reality, the blame more often lies with the speaker rather than the interrupter. Your listeners may be interrupting you because you take too long to get to the point or because you never pause to let them get a word in edgewise.

Another reason why you may be getting interrupted is due to any distracting behaviors that are overpowering your message. When your body language is inconsistent with your message, your listener is confused with what you are saying. Do they follow your message or what your body language is communicating?

You probably can relate to this example: The individual leading a meeting emphasizes how important it is for everyone to stay within the budget to meet the client's needs yet their posture, facial expressions and voice communicate there really isn't an emergency.

Your natural response to this situation might be to:

- Jump in and interrupt the interrupter
- Continue talking over the interrupter
- Allow the interrupter to take control of the conversation
- Ignore the situation all together

It is time for a self-check-in if you are falling victim to the interruptions. When you are frequently interrupted and you are not effective with pulling the conversation back on track, you run the risk of jeopardizing your reputation and relationship. The perception others create of you consists of lacking confidence, credibility, trust and leadership. No one wants to follow someone who breaks under challenging situations like interruptions.

It is difficult to influence others to take action when your message isn't heard or understood during the interruptions. And your ideas are worth hearing. Build rather than jeopardize your influence by applying the following steps during every conversation:

1. Get to the point quickly. Oftentimes, the more you say, the more you confuse resulting in frustrating your listeners. As their patience runs out, they interrupt to try to get the information they need from you. Remember, less is more!

2. Focus your passion. When we are passionate about a topic, we often feel compelled to tell our listeners everything we know about it. We think our listeners will be as passionate about it as we are. This is rarely true. Share your passion while keeping your message directed to what is important to your listeners. Your listeners are not interested in knowing your career history. Take the time prior to prepare (when you can) and during the conversation to answer the following questions:

- What is their knowledge level of your topic?
- What is their experience with your topic?
- What is their opinion on your topic?
- What do they need to know to take the action you are recommending?

Keep applying these answers throughout your message to make sure you tap into what is important to your listener that encourages them to take action.

3. Pause. Pause to listen and give the person time to speak. An influential communicator understands that the power of persuasion involves saying less and listening more. When you spend more time listening, you hear what your listener is not saying. I call it listening for their known unspoken. Pause allows you to listen to what is important to your listener. When you communicate a message that is all about you and what you want to do, you will ignite your listeners frustration. Your listeners are less likely to interrupt when they feel you truly care about what is important to them and what value they will receive when they act on your recommendation.

4. Interaction. Get your listeners involved in the conversation so that they feel like they add value and that their opinions are heard. Without interaction, the conversation is one-sided. Interaction increases engagement and connection which builds trust. It is difficult to interrupt someone who you trust and want to engage with. Interaction also allows you to adapt your message on fly; another way to communicate to your listeners you care about what is important to them.

5. Feedback. Consider the interruption a gift. An interruption is actually a friendly reminder that you need to get back on track or adapt your message to your listeners' needs. Take this feedback and run with it. Ask for feedback from family and friends you trust will tell you the truth. Ask them to make you more aware of when you interrupt. If you tend to interrupt, whether you know you are or not, your listeners will follow your lead and interrupt you.

Interruptions can be challenging to manage when they get out of control or you don't have the right steps to effectively get the conversation back on track. Start applying these five steps to every conversation. Give yourself feedback following an interaction where you needed to manage interruptions. Clearly identify what worked, what did not work and what you are willing to change. Dealing with any challenging situations requires practice and feedback to continue to grow your influence.

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