

Using Your Voice To Achieve Your Professional Goals



By Jennifer Blaga, *April 17, 2024*



On a scale of 1-10 how likely are you to use your voice to drive change for you? Attorneys may be accustomed to using rhetoric when it comes to matters of law, but when it comes to achieving professional goals or driving change in the workplace, the waters become a little murkier. Let's talk about how to effectively use your voice in order to achieve the goals you have for yourself. Your voice – how you talk to yourself and to others – plays a key role in helping you navigate a path, whether it's elevating your position, enhancing your skillset, pivoting in a new direction or growing your network. No matter what your professional goals, your ability to effectively use your voice will move the needle for you. Here's how.

Style Matters. Effective communication is largely dependent on both the message we want to deliver and the manner in which we deliver it. We should strive to communicate in the collaborative, intentionally engaging the space which lies safely between aggression or manipulation and passivity – a.k.a. the ASSERTIVE approach. The assertive speaker keeps an eye on their desired result (e.g., connecting, negotiating, motivating) and intentionally tailors their message and the delivery of that message for their specific audience. The assertive approach uses “I” statements (“I feel” rather than “you are”), sticks to only the facts and uses the Three Cs while speaking: clarity, consistency and courtesy.

Dynamic: A Force That Stimulates Progress. When you use your voice effectively, you create a dynamic with your audience. You are seeking to communicate in a way that engages the person or people to whom you are speaking through your tone, your word choice and active listening, thus creating a two-way street. Dynamic speakers weave in an appreciation of the emotions involved in a

particular conversation, especially when it comes to difficult topics or sensitive information. Your goal is to be clear, so as to avoid being misunderstood or misinterpreted, while you elicit a feeling about the message you're delivering, with the intention of moving the needle toward your desired result. For example, before you address a colleague's shortcomings, you may first need to put aside your personal frustrations and demonstrate genuine empathy for a difficult situation that the colleague is facing.

What You Are Not Saying Matters Too. Don't underestimate the power of your facial expressions, your gestures and your body language. These message-enhancing, non-verbal cues have the power of persuasion and can, when used effectively, increase credibility and the strength of your voice. On the other hand, when you do not pay attention to them, your non-verbal cues can create doubt or disinterest. Your whole body needs to buy in to the emotion you feel about your own message for you to effectively deliver the message and to elicit the desired reaction from your audience. Consider things like eye contact, your posture and your hands and practice using those tools in conjunction with the words you're saying in a mirror.

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Common "Mistakes." At times and even with the best of intentions, we may overexplain, overexpress or lay down qualifiers as we broach a difficult subject. The result is a watered-down message that draws attention to our own lack of confidence and highlights an inability to deliver that message effectively. Although your heart is in the right place, starting a conversation with "I'm sorry but," "I was wondering," "I can't because," can often move you from the driver's seat to the back seat when it comes to capturing (or not) the attention of and getting the desired reaction from your audience. The bottom line – refrain from qualifiers and get to your point.

The Roadmap

Learning to communicate more effectively starts from within. Though it may sound cliché, believing in yourself and what you can do is your first step. Then, set a goal and hold yourself accountable to that goal. These are all steps that require you to have a conversation with yourself first. That conversation begins with wanting something, having an emotional attachment to getting what you want and believing that you are worthy of getting what you want and are capable of doing what it takes to get it. Your inner voice can then coach your outer voice to effectively communicate the what, the why and the how of your message. This is different than just building confidence (though it is that, too), it requires you to shift your mindset and your inner dialogue over time.

Your Starting Point and the End Goal. Give yourself the opportunity to reflect on where you are, how you got here and why you are now in a position to need or want to use your voice effectively. Do your best to be honest with yourself while making sure the voice in your head remains supportive, confident and forward-thinking. Then consider the desired result - the end goal - and the appropriate audience. You will need to assess both thoroughly and work backwards from there in framing your message.

Your Toolkit. Internally, your voice is supported by the confidence you have in your own abilities, i.e., your own personal resources (your technical and “soft” skills). Externally, your voice is supported by your people resources (your “village”), the person or people who can help you communicate the message you want or need to deliver. When you need to deliver a message, you may need to lean on both your internal and external support. Don’t disqualify those around you from lending support. It is alright, and can make your message more effective, if you can recruit someone else to your corner.

Practice! The tone, word choice and non-verbal cues involved in your message will sound, look and feel more familiar each time you present them. Practicing can help get you comfortable. So, grab a mirror, a partner, a friend, or go for a ride in your car and practice using your voice to deliver your message.

About the Author



A 1994 graduate of Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, Jen Blaga has spent the past 30 years building relationships in the NE Ohio legal and business community. She has worked across the spectrum of recruiting and professional development in her capacities as a career coach, law firm administrator, legal research sales consultant, and search firm sales and placement director. With her most recent business adventure – Your Purple Crayon – she combines all of the components of her previous positions in order to help seasoned and newer professionals and management teams develop into the best version of themselves.