



When I was a theatre major in college, we studied playwright, Harold Pinter, the master of the pause. Pinter's plays included silences that said more than words could. Stillness powerfully conveyed meaning.

Fast forward to my work with IREM trainers and instructors. My favorite part of the job was to attend classroom courses and observe instructors in action. During one particular class, I witnessed something remarkable, "the classroom pause." Instructor, Stephen Cary would ask a question and wait. And wait. And wait. He never moved forward until someone in the audience answered the question. The silence was deafening, but it was a trigger for the class that Stephen was not going to provide all the answers and also that he genuinely wanted to know what his students thought. So, he waited for the answer or subsequent questions. Silence was magic for Stephen Cary.

Silence terrifies me. I'm the type of person who will keep talking just to ensure deadly lulls and empty spaces do not occur in normal conversation. The art of the pause works when you are trying to drive home an important point, deter a bully or allow the person to whom you are speaking to freely share ideas. But how do you use this powerful tool?

Here are some thoughts:

1

Count to 10.

After you ask a question, slowly and deliberately count to 10. If the question isn't answered or the other person doesn't speak, count to 10 again. The person will ultimately realize they have the floor and will speak. It may feel agonizing to do, but the results will show you have respect for your audience.

2

Pause after important points.

Before you go tearing into the next part of your presentation – pause. Breathe, look at your audience, and then continue. Your brief silence will solidify your point and give it more weight.

3

Actively Listen.

Don't finish the other person's sentence in your head and then cut them off because you weren't listening. Be in-the-moment. React to the discussion organically. Even if you rehearsed for a potentially difficult conversation, don't launch into the response you drafted, the actual response from the person may be different than you thought.

4

Use your body.

When talking to someone, don't fidget, look at your phone, look over the person's head or at the door. Give your audience your undivided attention. Look them in the eye with your hands calmly at your side or in your lap. Your body language can be a deterrent just as much as talking too much. Stand firm. Stand still.

Pause (lol) for a minute- what are your takeaways?

Balance is key for successfully conveying your message. There is room for silence in communication. As Mark Twain once said, "The right word may be effective, but no word was as ever effective as a rightly timed pause."

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