



5 ways to exude confidence in meetings, even if you aren't

By Joel Garfinkle

When you're lacking confidence, meetings can be some of the most daunting moments in your day. Where to stand, how to act, who to talk to? If you're busy thinking about whether or not you even belong, it's hard to focus on demonstrating your skill and expertise — the very reason you were invited. If you want to start shining as a confident leader the second you enter a meeting room, use the following behaviors at every opportunity. By practicing at your lower-level meetings, you'll be sure to exude confidence in higher-level ones, as well.

DO: Sit in the front of the room or head of the table

Taking a position directly amid the action signals that you really care about what's going on and what's being said; that you want to contribute and be heard. Even the physical act of going to the front of the room has a strong effect on other's impressions of you, whether they're fully aware of it or not. Placing yourself up front says you're willing and ready to lead.

AVOID: Sitting outside the focus area of discussion

Choosing a seat on the fringe leaves you exactly that — outside the circle of influence. People both consciously and unconsciously regard the chairs along the walls and back of the room as observer positions — for the gallery and not for people who are there to contribute. Don't lump yourself in with interns, assistants or auditors only there to listen. You belong there, so take a spot that reflects that.

DO: Treat senior executives as equals

Unless this is a town hall or one-way information push, you're at this meeting for a reason — to contribute. Speak up, make eye contact and add value. Engage in conversation with higher-ups, whether asking questions, offering up ideas, or sharing contextual knowledge and expertise about the situation at hand.

AVOID: Looking down and not making eye contact

Failing to look others in the eye may seem like deference or respect, but leaders want to know you're listening, engaged and ready to step forward when you have something to add. If you want to be seen as a rising star poised for leadership, go for full engagement — listening, speaking, body language and eye contact.

DO: Project your voice

Speak confidently and clearly when it's your turn to add something to the conversation. Even when — especially when — what you have to say might be seen as unpopular or bad news. You're an expert in your area and the best means you have to get your point across is in your own voice, and with conviction.

AVOID: Apologizing or second-guessing yourself

Don't be sorry for telling the truth (though do say it diplomatically). Oddly, the more sure you seem to be and the better you stand up for your statements, the more readily others will accept your position without holding it against you, even if they don't like what you told them. Your conviction instills confidence and respect, and in turn will bolster your own feelings of belonging at the table.

DO: Use your body position to convey confidence

Even when you're not feeling confident, I remind my clients to put themselves in the positions that show poise and presence. It's a funny trick of the brain, but not only will you look more confident, but leaning forward into the conversation at the table, or standing squarely with good posture at your desk during meetings can make you feel more confident, too. It will show in your face and your voice, which will really help you sell your points when it's your turn to speak.

AVOID: Slumping, slouching, or angling away from the conversation

Always avoid body positions that make you appear disinterested, whether in person or online. When you look tired, defeated or bored, senior leaders will not see you as keen to take on offered or assigned tasks. People are always watching to see how their words are impacting those they are speaking to. If you want to make a good impression, try to convey interest and enthusiasm, not reluctance.

DO: Engage before the meeting starts

People are inherently social. We always remember and react more warmly in business situations to those we've had casual conversation with. Take advantage of those moments before a meeting begins to chat with those around you. It might feel a bit awkward, but resist the urge to zone out on your phone. If small talk is not in your wheelhouse, prepare a few things you might say to keep things going in the two to five minutes of idle conversation.

AVOID: Lowering the height of your chair

When you drop your seat down so that you're no longer at eye level with others at the table, you're defining yourself as a junior member of the discussion. This means you may be disregarded. Even if it's not your preferred position, or you have to reach a bit with your feet (within reason), don't adjust it like you would your office chair. Most meetings aren't so long that you should need to have it perfectly set for ergonomic performance.

I'm always encouraging my clients to take on new challenges and push their limits. When you're outside your comfort zone — speaking up and stepping up to take on new opportunities — it can seem daunting and tempting to shrink away from standing out. As you take these steps and engage in self-reflection, you'll come to know yourself in a deeper way than ever before. That will enhance your sense of clarity and purpose, allowing you to move through life with conviction and resolve. All those around you will sense your aura of confidence and aspire to emulate it as they too strive to blossom as leaders.

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