



Episode 8: To Sound Confident, Avoid These Phrases

Welcome to *In the Right Direction* podcast, where we believe you get to choose what's on your plate, you can manage the overwhelm, and that change is possible. I'm your host, Deb Elbaum, and I'm here to share insights and strategies to increase your happiness one baby step at a time. Let's dive in.

Hi everyone, it's Deb. Today, let's talk about how language can affect our confidence, how the words we say to ourselves and to others can add to or take away from our confidence as a communicator and as a leader. Let me ask you this question. When you share your ideas, how confident do you feel?

Confidence, our belief in ourself, matters deeply. It underlies everything we do. It helps us speak up, share our point of view, have tough conversations, and even ask for promotions. And yet, so many of us use certain words and phrases without even realizing it that undermine our confidence. These small, seemingly innocuous words and phrases, that are habits we're not even aware of, can have a big negative impact. It's time to notice and remove these phrases from your vocabulary so that you can immediately feel more empowered, confident, and more like the leader you want to be. What are these phrases that erode your presence and make it seem like you don't really believe what you are saying? Here they are: "I think," "I just think," "I sort of think," "I kind of think."

You might be wondering, "What's so harmful about those phrases? Aren't they a normal way to speak?" Well, yes, and no. These phrases can give the impression that you're not sure of yourself, that you don't completely stand for what you are saying. And when you are sure of yourself, when you do know what you're saying, these words can undermine that confidence.

Here's an example from one of my clients. I started working with a client who was a C-level at a large company. She's been there for years. She's clearly a respected leader. I asked her about her superpowers, and she said to me, "I think I'm good at building teams." I think I'm good at building teams. Okay, here's a leader who's been at a company for two decades, been promoted many times over, and she says, "I think I'm good at building teams"? "Hold on a second," I said, "did you hear yourself say that phrase, 'I think'? Can you say it again and get rid of that phrase?" "I am good at building teams," she said, and this time the word sounded much more confident, like there was no question that building teams is one of her superpowers. When I asked her how that felt, she said it felt true and more empowering. It helped her own this superpower, and all it took was removing that one phrase.

We all use phrases like "I think," "I just think," "I kind of think," "I sort of think" all the time, and when you really do know something, when you really do have an opinion, phrases like this do real damage. They affect how you see yourself and how others see you. Do you have a colleague who uses phrases like this all the time? If yes, think about the impression it makes. Does it inspire confidence? It's time to put more attention to what you say and how you say it, to be intentional about the words you use when you speak about yourself, your abilities, and your knowledge.

Instead of using those phrases, here are some more empowering ones you can try: "I know," "I believe," "In my experience," "Here's how I would approach it," "The data shows," "I'm known for." There are actually tons of ways you can share your ideas much more powerfully. The key is awareness and practice. After you catch yourself using disempowering phrases, pause and restate it using confident language. Practice out loud and give yourself permission to try a range of phrases and tones to see which ones feel authentic and powerful for you. In addition to those phrases, other language too can have a negative impact on how we're perceived at work.

Here's an example from another client who is a leader in the finance industry. She's a woman in a male-dominated field, and although my client is confident about her values and abilities, she didn't realize that she was using language that gave a totally different impression. Early on in our coaching, we had a check-in meeting with her boss to hear about his perception of how she could be a more powerful leader in the organization. He said, "I want to give you some feedback about your speech. We've all noticed that you have a habit in meetings, saying 'Can I ask a question?' before you ask a question, and when you do this, it makes us think that you are not confident about speaking up and that you don't feel worthy of having a seat at the table."

When my client heard this feedback, she was shocked. She had no idea she ever did this, and the truth is that she actually did feel worthy and confident. She realized that this unconscious habit was harming her reputation and how she was seen. My client was so grateful to her boss for sharing that feedback, she immediately changed her behavior, and now she jumps right in and asks her question, and she's seen as more of a leader. We talk all the time. We talk to ourselves, and we talk to other people, and most of the time, we are not aware of the words coming out of our mouth.

There's a brain reason for this. It's because a key part of our brain involved with speech, called Broca's area, actually shuts down when we start to speak. We literally do not hear ourselves talk in the same way that we're able to hear other people talk. So, it's up to us to put extra attention to the words coming out of our mouths so that our language is aligned with how we want to feel, how we want others to see us, and the impact we want to have.

Let's bring this to you in your life. During the next few weeks, I invite you to pay attention to your language patterns, to phrases that you use all the time, and to how confident you feel in different types of situations. Notice if you use those phrases, if you say, "I think," "I just think," "I sort of think," "Can I ask a question?" and notice the tone you use. Think about situations in which you want to be seen as more confident. Maybe it's as a new leader taking on increased responsibility or speaking up in meetings where people regularly talk over you. It's time to build your confidence through intentional language. Then practice more powerful phrases and more confident tones and body language. Try saying "I know," "I believe," "I recommend," "Here's what I know," "Here's how I think about it," "My superpower is." Say it like it mean it and see what it feels like. Our words create our reality. I want you to create a reality of owning your value, owning your worth, and owning your impact. If you would like to chat about your confidence and what's getting in the way, please email me at deb@debelbaum.com Thank you so much for listening and for being part of my community.

Until next time!