



The Professional Woman's Mentor

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# Scripts & Tips for Work Conversations

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Finding the Balance: Kind & Ambitious

# Scripts & Tips

## Introduction

Professional women often struggle to find the balance between being kind and ambitious at work. To avoid coming across arrogant or bitchy, we often adjust our speech in an effort to soften our messages.

First the bad news... the double standard against ambitious women is real. The more successful and ambitious a woman is, the less likable she becomes. This is a tough spot to be in because likability is a critical factor as we rise in our careers. Harvard Business Review did a study that found people value likability even more than competence, and would choose to work with a likable person over a competent person. HBR calls the people who are skilled at combining likability and ambition “Lovable Stars”.

Now the good news... there are small changes in the way that we communicate that will transform us into Lovable Stars!!

Following the Scripts & Tips on the following pages will increase your likeability and promotability.

# 100+ conversation scripts & tips that will help you rise with confidence and grace!

## Scripts

### Showcasing your work

An aversion to self-promotion can get in the way of letting people know about your great work. Keep these phrases in mind when you want (or need) to draw attention to your work:

- I'm really proud that... (the “xyz” project reduced quote turnaround time by five days. Our customers have been asking us to do better in this area for a long time)
- I'm so excited that I was chosen to lead the xxxx project. It will (fill in the benefits).
- Our customer stat results have been so much higher this year! It was so rewarding to participate in the Customer Engagement task force.

### Speaking Up

Sharing your ideas, opinions, and suggestions is critical to increase your level of influence and promotability. The next time you find yourself wanting to speak up in a meeting, start with:

- I have a suggestion, ...
- Here's what I've been thinking...
- I've done some research on this topic, I learned that...
- I agree with Dave's points, and...
- That reminds me of...
- Following on that, let's consider the impact of...
- One risk that I see is...
- A potential impact of that decision to consider is...

### Disagreeing with Kindness

It can be challenging to share an opposing idea, solution, or course of action. This is especially true when you are the most junior person in the room! Here are a few ways to introduce your ideas boldly without negatively impacting your likeability:

- I see it differently...
- I have another option for us to explore...
- Let's discuss the potential outcomes if we...
- My experience has been...
- I'm concerned about the impact to <insert stakeholder group, project name, customer, etc.>. What if we were to <insert idea> instead?
- I agree that we need to find a better way to <insert a shared desired outcome>. <insert your idea> would achieve that.
  - Example: I agree that we need to find a better way to serve our customers. Investing in customer service training would achieve that.

## Stopping Interruptions

It's no fun being interrupted when we are sharing our brilliance! So what's a person to do? Take back control of the discussion by saying:

- Excuse me, I wasn't finished.
- Please let me finish my idea, I'll be glad to hear your thoughts when I'm finished.
- I'd appreciate the opportunity to finish my thought before we begin discussing other solutions.
- There are a few more points I need to make. Can you delay a moment while I do that?
- I know I will appreciate your feedback, would you hold that thought until I've finished?

And... calling attention when others are interrupted helps all of us!

- Excuse me Joe, Jennifer wasn't finished sharing her suggestion.
- Sally, please let Sally finish and then we will give you the floor.
- Bob, would you please hold your thoughts until Jane has finished?

## Navigating Emotional Topics

If you've ever felt your neck get hot, eyes tear up, or your voice waver during an emotional discussion... you know first hand how our emotions can make a conversation challenging. Use these responses to defer the discussion to allow you time to think about your response, or to gather more information to help you see the other person's point of view:

- I'll need some time to reflect before I'm ready to discuss this topic further.
- Clearly, I have strong feelings on this topic. I'll schedule time later this week for us to talk about it further. .
- I agree with <the part of the statement you agree with>, and I see <the part of the statement you don't agree with> differently.
- I'm having a difficult time understanding your point of view. Can you tell me more?
- I want to understand your suggestion better, are there additional details you could provide that would help me do that?

## Giving Feedback

It's often more difficult to give feedback than it is to receive it. This especially true when we care deeply for the person who will be on the receiving end, or when we are uncertain how they will react. Show empathy by initiating the conversation with one of these options:

- I have some advice that might help you.
- I'm so impressed with your work, and want others to see your brilliance. I've noticed a habit that I believe will get in the way of that. May I share my observation with you?
- I've been struggling with something I need to talk with you about. Your relationship is important to me, and that's what is making this so difficult.
- I'd like to have a conversation that may be difficult for both of us. I respect your opinion, which makes this even more difficult. I'm concerned that...
- Here's what I'm seeing... (then) How do you see it? (or) Do you see this differently?

- Remove “You” when possible:
  - “What could have been done differently in this situation?”  
Not  
“What do you think you could have done differently in this situation”
- I want to have a great working relationship with you. In order to do that, I need to share something with you that has been bothering me. Can we talk about it?

## Receiving Feedback

Receiving feedback about how we can improve our performance is hard. This is especially true when feedback is a surprise or we completely disagree with what we are hearing. Remember this – Feedback is simply one person’s opinion or perspective, and many people aren’t skilled in the art of giving it. Get curious. Ask Questions. Find the hidden gem of truth that will help you grow. These questions and phrases will help:

- Tell me more about what you are seeing.
- Can you provide a specific example when you’ve seen (fill in the blank)?
- How would you recommend I handle these types of situations differently?
- Thank you for sharing this with me. I’ll need some time to think about how to best incorporate your feedback.
- Thank you for sharing this with me, it’s helpful to understand your perspective.. I see it differently, may I share what I’m thinking?

When you need time to respond:

- This is hard for me to hear. Can we discuss this further tomorrow?
- Clearly this is difficult for me. I’ll need some time to think about your feedback. (This is especially helpful when tears well up)
- I’m very surprised by this feedback. I’ll need a bit of time before I’m ready to respond. Can I schedule time with you later this week for us to continue this conversation?

## Demonstrating Confidence

There is an art to boldly sharing your ideas while nurturing relationships. This is especially important when presenting an idea that is not popular, or one that you believe may create an emotional response. Try introducing your big idea by starting with:

- This discussion has helped me see the issue from a different view point. Here’s what I think are the best next steps...
- Let’s do some brainstorming about the best approach, here’s what I’m thinking...
- Here’s what I’m thinking... What are your thoughts on the topic?
- This is a challenging problem that will require us to consider solutions we haven’t implemented in the past. One option would be to...
- After sharing your idea, proposal, or solution ask:  
Do you have any questions?  
Instead of:  
Does that make sense? (suggests that you may not have made sense)  
or  
Was that clear? (suggests that you don’t think your point was made)

## Thanking Co-workers and your boss

Saying thank you is simple, builds connections, and is often overlooked. The basics of thanking people as quickly as possible, sharing details, and being genuine with praise apply to this section. And while we're at it, remember to say thank you to your boss every now and then! There are many different ways to say "thank you", here are a few:

- I'm grateful for the way you...
- You were instrumental in .....
- I appreciate your focus on ....
- Having you on this team helps us to ....
- I am continually impressed with the way you...
- The work you did to <insert result> was fantastic!

## Eliminate Minimizers

Small changes in approach will raise a person's level of credibility and influence. Reducing your ideas and contributions is never a good plan. Remove these words and phrases from your vocabulary to increase promotability:

- Just  
This minimizes your ideas and the amount of time you take up
  - I'll just take a minute of your time.
  - I was just thinking that we might want to...
  - I just want to make sure that...
- I'll try  
Be specific about what you will do, and when you will do it.
  - I'll try to have the report to you by the end of day tomorrow.
  - I can try to get the team together after lunch.
- Sorry  
Only use "sorry: when you've stepped on someone's toe, or have VERY good reason to apologize. The "Sorry Habit" will put you in a subservient position, create an impression that you lack strength, or leave you taking the fall for outcomes that weren't your responsibility.
  - Sorry, I should have reminded you to submit the report by noon yesterday.
  - Sorry, I didn't hear what you said. Would you please repeat that?
  - I didn't know you wanted it yesterday. Sorry, I'll work on it now.
  - NOTE: Substituting the word "sorry" for "I apologize" isn't better! Drop that too.
- Filler Words  
"Like", "Um", "You know", "So", and "Kind of" are a few common filler words. The constant use of these words is distracting, reduces the impact of what is being said,, and will make you appear to be less confident and competent. Tips on how to eliminate these meaningless fillers include:
  - Pause to gather your thoughts
  - Practice what you will say
  - Join Toastmasters
- Minimizing Phrases
  - This is probably a bad idea, but...
  - This is probably a stupid suggestion, but I was thinking...
  - I'm sure you've thought of this already, but what if we...

## Eliminate Passive-Aggressive Words & Phrases

Ugh!! The dreaded passive-aggressive language. These words and phrases not only make it difficult to hear a message, the speakers likeability plummets every time these are used:

- Assume  
When leaders use “assume”, it feels like an attempt to show authority in a passive-aggressive way. When front line employees use “assume”, it feels like an attempt to avoid taking responsibility.
  - I assume you’ll be ready for the presentation tomorrow.
  - I assumed that Jill was working on the presentation.
- As we discussed  
This one comes across as patronizing, condescending, and rude.
  - As we discussed, the client is expecting a full report in the morning.
- No offence  
When you start a sentence with “no offence, but...”, it’s a sign that you are in fact about to say something offensive. It doesn’t soften the message.
- With all due respect  
The listener is getting ready to be disrespected as soon as these words are uttered.
- No brainer  
If the listener didn’t know, they feel like an idiot. If they did know, they feel like their time was wasted. In either case, the speaker looks like a know-it-all.
- Honestly  
When you start a conversation with “Honestly”, it sends a signal that in other conversations you aren’t being honest. This is often a word that is used to justify the gossip the speaker is about to spread. “Honestly, she didn’t spend enough time preparing for the interview.”

## Replace

- Replace “but” with “and”
  - I like your idea, and I’m wondering how much it will cost
  - Instead of:  
I like your idea, but I’m wondering how much it will cost.
- Replace “you” with “I”
  - This is the way I would manage the project.
  - Instead of:  
This is the way you should manage the project.
- Replace “I think” with “I believe”
  - I believe this is the best solution.
  - Instead of:  
I think this is the best solution.
- Replace “should” with “I intend to”
  - I intend to write a book about low sodium cooking.
  - Instead of:  
I should write a book about low sodium cooking.
- Replace “I’m sorry” with “Thank you”
  - Thank you for listening to me.
  - Instead of:  
I’m sorry for always talking so much.

- Thank you for listening to my concerns. Or Thank you for understanding my passion on this topic.  
Instead of:  
I'm sorry for being so sensitive. Thank you for doing me a favor.  
Instead of:  
I'm sorry you have to help me so much.
- Thank you for being patient while I'm learning.  
Instead of:  
I'm sorry I'm always making mistakes.
- Thank you for waiting for me.  
Instead of:  
I'm sorry I was late.

## Words & Phrases that Build Likeability

- I understand.
- That's brilliant.
- That's a great question.
- How can I help?
- If I understand correctly, you'd like to...
- I appreciate your input.
- Thank you.
- You're welcome.
- I'll find out.
- Why not?
- I trust your judgement.
- What can we do better next time?
- What was my part in this? (when things go wrong)
- How do you see it?
- Tell me more about (insert a point of view or opinion the other person holds)

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