

The Benefits of Positive Language

Research shows positive language, both verbal and body language, has a beneficial impact not only on how you feel, but on how others see you and respond to you. We often experience times in our lives or particular situations where we feel less confident or secure. By being aware and selectively using positive responses it is possible to overcome insecurities, increase our confidence and make a greater impact in the process.

Verbal Language

At times when you feel less confident or secure it's common to slip into using two types of language:

Qualifiers

"You probably already know this, but Jack is off sick today."

"I could be wrong, but I think sales might be down on budget this month."

Weakening statements

"It's just a small thing, but I'd like to book some holiday."

"I'm only telling you this because Julie told me to."

Using this type of language sends a message, which may influence your audience and give them a negative impression of the situation or your ability. If you think they are receiving you negatively it may well have a knock-on effect and increase your lack of confidence or nervousness making you more unsure of yourself.

By choosing more positive language, 'faking it till you make it', you actively fight against this happening and will usually feel more confident. On TED Talks (ted.com), Amy Cuddy gives more insight into the physical and psychological effects of 'faking it'.

"You probably already know this, but Jack is off sick today" changes to, "Jack is off sick today."

"I'm probably wrong but I think sales might be down on budget this month" becomes, "I am predicting we will miss budget this month."

"It's just a small thing, but I'd like to book some holiday" becomes, "I'd like to book some holiday in June."

"I'm only telling you this because Julie told me to" becomes, "You need to know"

Body Language

Body language also impacts the impression we create. Regardless of how we actually feel, we can choose the image we present to those around us.

Negative Body Language	Positive Body Language
Stooping in on yourself	Standing straight
Lack of eye contact/head down	Direct eye contact
Flicking a pen or fidgeting	Sitting still
Folded arms	Natural arm position
Shaking or rapidly moving hands	Hidden or gentle hand movements

Put it into practice

Making a few small adjustments to your vocabulary and body language can have a large impact on the impression you create and how you feel.

There are various ways you can work on presenting a more confident and competent image:

- One of the best ways to use more positive language and change your style is to ask a trusted colleague or friend to give you private feedback whenever you slip into negative language, and also when you successfully use positive language so you become more conscious of the message(s) you are sending. If you are struggling to think of an alternative way to say something, they may give you a different way of looking at things.
- People are usually pleased to be asked to help, and become vested in supporting your development. This enables you to have constructive and timely feedback to help you to become more conscious of how you communicate. Positive feedback is also affirming when you are trying to change a habit – it is not an easy task.
- When you have a particular situation or challenge to deal with, you can practice by drafting what you want to say or communicate and then use a mirror or video it to observe yourself. You might feel a bit uncomfortable at first, but it is worth persevering to help you get a clearer picture of how other people see you and what they hear. Many of the most accomplished public speakers use a mirror or video to fine-tune or test their communication.

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- Join a local Toastmasters group. Toastmasters has many years' experience of giving members strategies, feedback, and regular opportunities to practice their communication and presentation skills. This is usually done in personal time, so can also seem less threatening than practicing in front of work colleagues.
- Observe a confident communicator you admire. Identify what sort of language they use, what their body language says to you, and what other factors make you think they are competent, confident, and relaxed. Try some of these ideas yourself and see how they make you feel and appear to others.