

6 Rules to Speak with Credibility

Your credibility checklist — run through it before you speak in any high-stakes room.

Your credibility gets decided before anyone has assessed your argument — in the words you choose, your tone of voice, and your body language in the first 30 seconds. I've spent years training leaders and moderating executive conferences inside some of the world's biggest organisations, including Google, Nestlé and Nespresso. These are the six rules I come back to again and again. Run through them before your next important meeting.

BEFORE YOU SPEAK

- ☐ I can state my recommendation in one clear sentence.
- ☐ I know the key decision(s) this room is here to make.

RULE 01 State your point clearly and concisely

Open with your situation and recommendation in the first 15–30 seconds — four sentences or fewer — then pause. Hedging ("I might be wrong, but...") asks the room for permission and weakens your point before you've made it.

- ☐ I lead with my recommendation, not a build-up to it
- ☐ I've cut the permission-seeking preamble ("I might be wrong, but...")
- ☐ I can say it in four sentences or fewer, then pause
- ☐ I flag genuine uncertainty once — I don't sound uncertain in every sentence

RULE 02 Finish your sentences like statements

Two habits leak authority from your voice rather than your words: uptalk (a rising note that makes a statement sound like a question) and filler (um, like, you know). The most authoritative replacement for a filler word isn't a better one — it's silence.

- ☐ My statements end flat and certain, not on a rising note
- ☐ I replace "um," "like" and "you know" with a pause
- ☐ I've practised the one-minute drill: speak for 60 seconds on any topic with zero fillers
- ☐ When in doubt, I slow down and let silence do the work

RULE 03 Don't oversell

Credibility only holds if your actions back it up. Overselling — a big vision you can't fully deliver — costs you a little trust with every excuse. Be specific about what you'll do, then do it.

- ☐ I've promised only what I can deliver
- ☐ I've set clear checkpoints — specific deliverables and dates
- ☐ I'm giving the room concrete chances to watch me land what I said

RULE 04**Be mindful of your body language**

Strangers read status within seconds. Prestige — the kind that earns respect — looks like a slight chest expansion, chin up rather than down, and a small smile. Shrinking or leaning back quietly undoes it.

- ☐ I'm sitting or standing tall — shoulders back, chin level
- ☐ Slight chest expansion, a small smile, engaged
- ☐ I'm taking up my space, not making myself smaller

RULE 05**Dare to name the elephant in the room**

Honesty is central to credibility. When there's bad news, disclose it before anyone else can — clearly, without excuses — and put a proposed solution right behind it.

- ☐ I've planned to name the tension or bad news first
- ☐ I deliver it cleanly — no filler, no hedging, no excuses
- ☐ A proposed solution follows immediately behind it

RULE 06**Focus on the decision, not on yourself**

Experienced rooms can tell whether you're serving the decision or serving your ego. Before you walk in, answer one question: what does this person need from me today, and what decision are we here to make?

- ☐ I've answered: what does this person need from me today?
- ☐ I'll change my recommendation if someone brings better information
- ☐ I'll name the person who did the work when credit is available
- ☐ I'm willing to argue against my own self-interest when it's right

Two things worth knowing: this is **trainable and measured** — in one study, managers trained on a small handful of these habits raised their perceived competence by around 60% in a few weeks. And credibility takes **months to build but one meeting to lose**. One oversell, one broken promise, can undo it.

If you'd like support with this

This is trainable — and it compounds. If you'd like help applying it across your organisation, I work with senior leaders through two programs:

Speak to Resonate

My six-module flagship program — one-to-one or group — rated 4.95/5 by over 192 leaders at Nestlé, Nespresso, Incyte, Tandem Diabetes Care and more.

shannonjenkins.co/speaktoresonate

The Influential Leader

A premium two-day in-person leadership training in Switzerland, for senior leaders.

shannonjenkins.co/theinfluentialleader

Or write to me directly at hello@shannonjenkins.co