


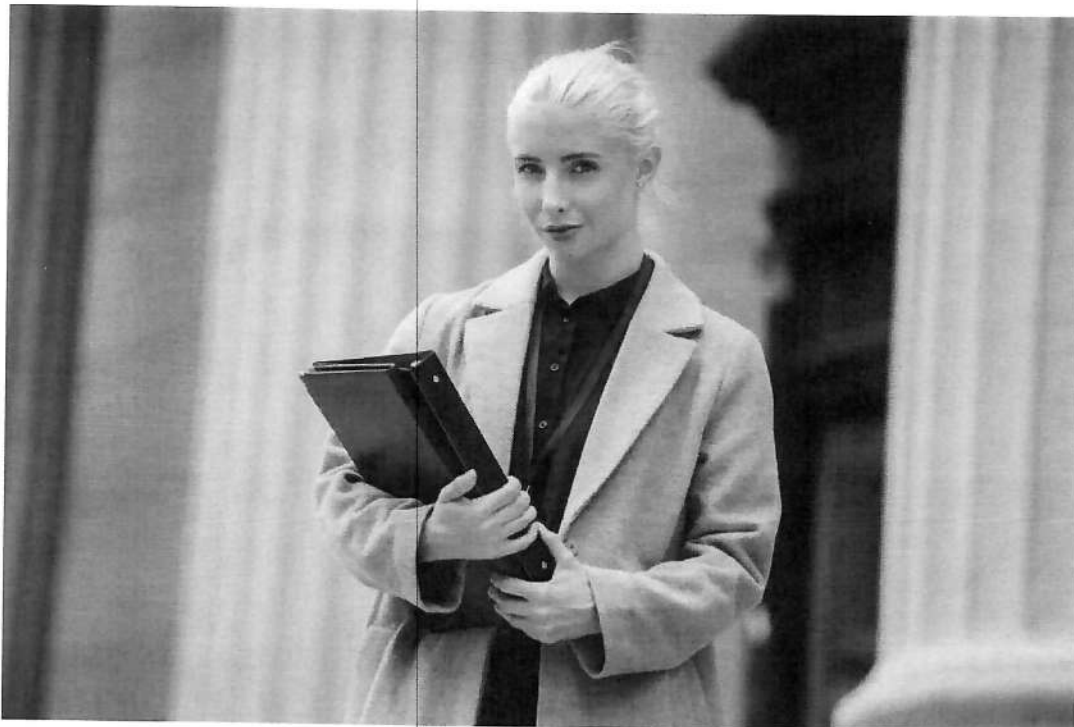
# 7 Communication Mistakes That Make You Sound Less Competent And Shy

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Don't make these communication mistakes. PEXELS-SORA-SHIMAZAKI

**By Dianna Booher**

The cocky demeanor of a used-car salesperson is likely not the look you're going for. But most professionals do want to convey confidence when they communicate—whether in emails, in virtual settings, or in person.

To look and sound confident and competent, avoid these communication mistakes:

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## Softened Commands and Requests

**Examples:** “Could you please sign and return this form at your convenience?” “Would you consider attending this meeting to offer your input?” “These reports should be submitted to me weekly.”

**Tip:** People use these “soft” phrases, thinking they sound less demanding. Instead, they sound weak, unauthoritative, non-urgent. You can always add courtesy phrases while still stating your request or command in a direct, confident way. For example:

--“Please sign and return this form at your convenience.”

--“If you can attend the meeting, I will appreciate your input.”

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--“Please submit these reports to me weekly.”

Of course, at times, you may want to sound tentative and non-demanding. (But that’s another blog altogether.) Aim to sound courteous, confident, and competent.

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## Tentative Times

**Examples:** “as soon as possible” “at your earlier convenience”  
“within the next few days”

If you don't have a specific deadline in mind, fine. You can let the other person decide when to respond. But in most situations, I've discovered that people really do have specific deadlines in mind. But they fail to state them. They equate courtesy with vagueness.

That mistaken thinking results in having to send out “reminder” emails because their first attempt was vague. Actually, it's rather discourteous and irritating to receive a follow-up email telling you that you need to finish something by the next day. Surprise!

**Tip:** If you have a specific deadline in mind, state it. You can always give your reader or listener an “out.” Example: “We need these forms returned no later than June 2. If you can't meet that deadline, please let us know when we can expect to receive your information.”

## Wiggle Words

**Examples:** “This software will *likely* resolve the situation.” “You will *probably* gain the background you need for the next job.” “When we receive all proposals, they can be *leisurely* evaluated on a *truly* comparative basis.” Note the hedging words in italics.

**Tip:** Remove the adjectives and adverbs. Stick with nouns and verbs to carry the weight of your message. Although wiggle words

give you room to interpret as you please, they sound tentative and lack impact.

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## Awesome Adjectives

**Examples:** “Keith did an amazing presentation.” (Really? Did the presentation win a contract? A promotion or bonus?)

Agent: “Do you have your drivers license with you?” (You show your license as ID.) The agent responds: “Awesome. Thanks.” (Really? Showing your ID is an awesome act? What would the agent say if she saw you do a 40-foot dive off a cliff into a frigid ocean?)

**Tip:** Use appropriate descriptors. Lapsing into cliches like “absolutely,” “amazing,” and “awesome” makes you sound like a careless, lazy communicator rather than an articulate professional.

## Bobble Heads

Women, more often men, tend to nod when someone is speaking to them. With that nodding, they are communicating “I hear you. I understand what you’re saying.” The nodding may or may not mean agreement.

But others often *interpret* such nodding to mean, “I agree.” A total miscue.

Other bobble-head mistakes: Tilting your head to the side (often communicates shyness and/or the need for approval). Tilting your chin downward and to the side while glancing upward (often communicates the need for approval—and conveys comes across as flirting).

**Tip:** Unless you intend to communicate agreement, keep your head still and your chin level as you listen to others.



## Limp Lead-ins

**Examples:** “I just wanted to ask you if ....” “I was wondering if....”  
“We are just following up to confirm that ...”

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**Tip:** Drop the tentative lead-ins to emails and conversations. You are entitled to ask a question, solicit feedback, offer a suggestion, or whatever. So get directly to the point with, “We’re following up to confirm that ...” Or: “I have a question about the upcoming summit: Are you planning to ....”

## Clichéd Closings and Openings

**Examples:** “I hope you are well,” used as an opener. “If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me,” used as a closing line. “We appreciate your business,” used as a closer.

**Tip:** Pleasantries in an email or conversation build a strong relationship. Just make sure they sound sincere and original to the message and the person. If the opening or closing seems to “roll off your tongue,” don’t let it. Think again.

Any of the following can work as an original closing line: “If you need more logistical details about the convention, you can reach me at 555-1212.” Or “Hoping you have a great vacation in Spain next week.” Or “If you have questions about exceptions to this policy, please direct them to Mike Smith at ext. 123.”

Choose your words for the image and impact you intend. Confidence and competence as a communicator pay big dividends—personally and for your organization.



*Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 50 books, including Communicate Like a Leader. She helps organizations communicate clearly and individuals increase influence with a strong personal presence.*

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