



## Will My Speaking Up Work Against Me?

I was startled when a senior professional asked me the question mentioned above.

Whether it is about contributing to discussions, pitching ideas, or even expressing difference of opinion, speaking up at work is so important.

On one hand, it is crucial for one's team and organization wherein [leaders with great potential](#) can add valuable inputs. On the other hand, speaking up helps executives gain visibility, influence, credibility, and authority.

Then why do leaders choose to stay silent rather than speak up? Why do they find it challenging to express their viewpoints in their organizations, in meetings and in boardrooms?

Research done by Fierce Conversations and Quantum Workplace revealed that -

About half of employees don't regularly speak their minds at work.

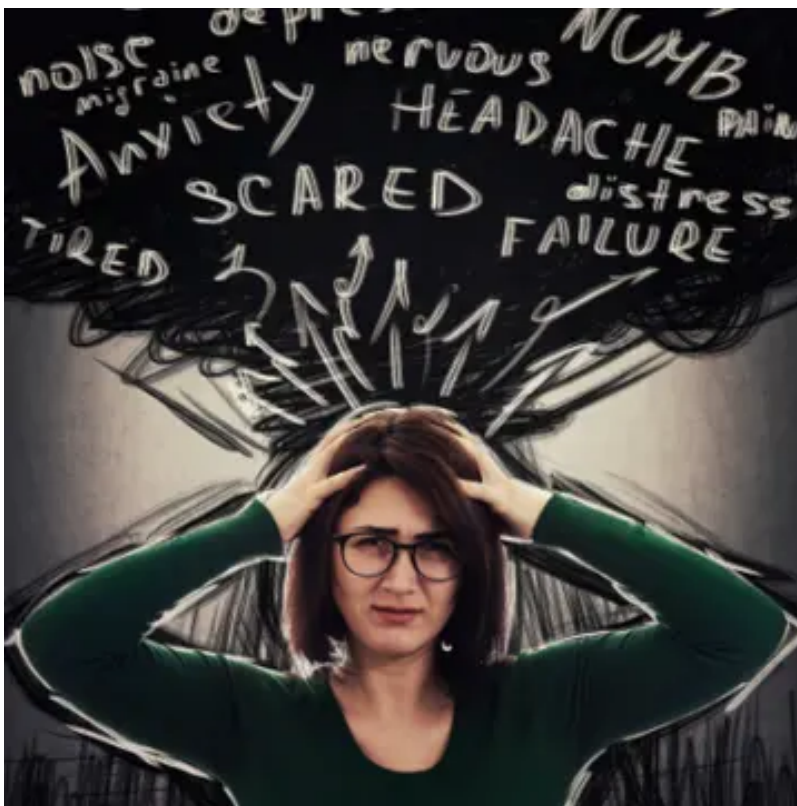
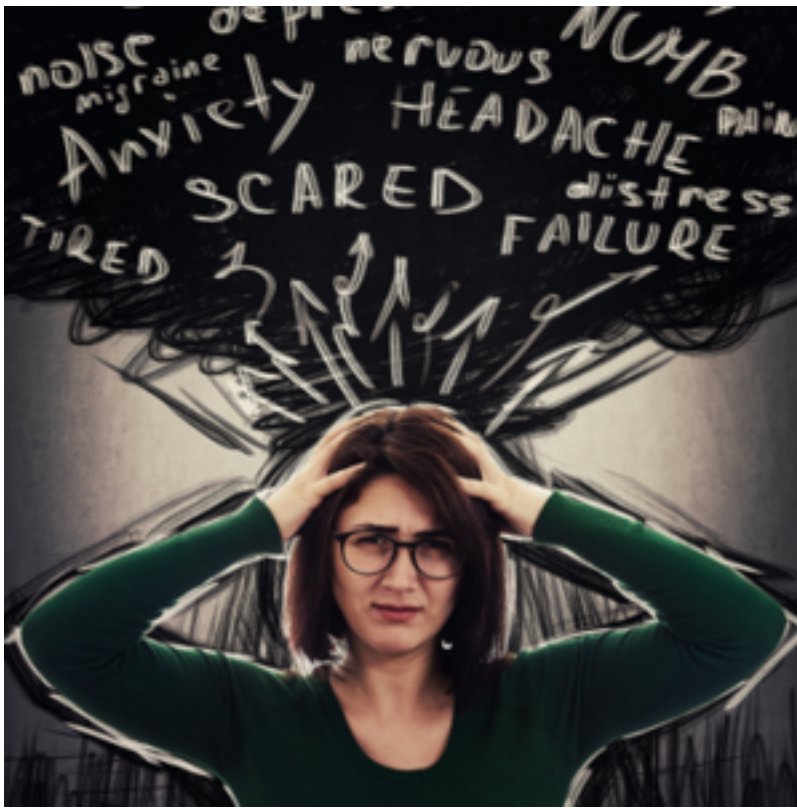
### Will my speaking up work against me?

Over time, more than one person across leadership workshops have expressed the fear that speaking up in front of their seniors may work against them.

On deeper probing, I have realised that It is either due to the fear of consequences or for the sake of harmony, that a leader refrains from expressing openly.

"If I speak up, there will be consequences". "What if I may get fired or in bad books of the boss?"

Where does this fear come from?



It can be argued that the culture of fear in the organization as demonstrated by the leadership style is primarily to blame for this lack of expression. It is certainly true. It is indicative of a trust deficit in the organization. Yet, I have found, that in the same organization, there are other people who are willing to voice their opinion. How does that happen?

How is it that in the same organization, and with the same boss, one person is able and willing to speak up while another isn't? Intriguing, isn't it?

Having worked with many people on their limiting beliefs, I have found that many a time it is due to some [childhood trauma, cultural conditioning or parenting values](#) that turn the most talented people into submissive leaders.

One of my workshop attendees reflected upon how his speaking against bullying in school led to him being isolated and abandoned by his friends.

What did he learn from it? - "Don't speak up. It has bad consequences."

Another leader told me that every time he would speak his mind as a child which adults didn't like, he was beaten up so hard or received so much of anger that he decided to keep quiet for the sake of harmony.

Yet another leader recalled the following, "I used to talk so much as a child that my aunt took a sticking tape and pasted it on my mouth."

Such residual memories become big blocks and hinder us from gathering the courage to share our opinion, even on an important matter. Other times, our values stop us. Here's a real story:

A leader was required to get monthly meetings to decisions and action points. But each time his meeting would get hijacked either by boss or peer leaving him frustrated. When we explored at deeper level, we found something astounding. This leader said – “People who interrupt are rude and arrogant people. I don’t want to be rude or arrogant”. I asked – “What is the opposite of rude?” “Humble, modest”, he quipped. His identity of being a humble person who didn’t want to be rude or arrogant prevented him from being assertive, leaving him ineffective at his job. On the contrary, the stakeholders needed this CXO leader to be more assertive. His own value of humility became a derailer for him.

Speaking Up is important for your Executive Presence



If a leader speaks up his/her mind without offending others, it will actually work in their favor.  
[Assertive communication is an integral part of Executive Presence.](#)

Leaders who are truthful, transparent and not shy of speaking truth to power gain respect of their stakeholders. These are leaders who are not afraid to take a stand, have conviction in their point of view and are not afraid to convey bad news, if needed. Neither do they avoid difficult conversations. It's a heady mix of respect for the other and [self-confidence that makes these leaders stand out.](#)

Assertiveness is a sweet spot where you give equal importance to your needs and the other's with direct, honest and caring communication.

On the other hand, if a leader cares too much to be direct and honest in his communication lest he should hurt others' feelings, he is being submissive. Many leaders see it as this or that... you can either be caring OR honest. In reality, it is possible to be both – honest AND caring.

In our culture, we are hardwired not to be assertive but submissive. We think speaking up is being arrogant. We look at seniors in the workplace the way we used to see our father or school principal as children. We have been taught not to argue with elders or figures of authority - to keep quiet and listen. So, we choose to stay quiet.

This brings us to answer the next substantial question.

**What is the impact of not speaking up?**



Not speaking up can be a double whammy – It is not only [detrimental to your leadership effectiveness](#), but also to your health.

Visualise a crucial decision is being taken in your organization, where your opinion really matters. You may have a point of view (suggestions or a contrary view), but you decide to keep quiet because you are unsure and don't want to rock the boat.

**Consequence 1** – You bury your presence, your ideas, value, and position under your tight lips. And remain unknown amongst peers and senior stakeholders.

**Consequence 2** – Your team who is looking to you for leadership may feel disappointed as they value your inputs and you have not been forthcoming. They may be able to sense your dissonance from your body language which may be confusing for them.

**Consequence 3-** Your organizational initiative could have benefitted from your ideas. As you never shared your thoughts, you will never know.

**Consequence 4** – You find an increasing lack of motivation within yourself as you know you are not living in the integrity of thought, word, and action. You go about the motions of daily life, but inside, there is a build-up of stress due to non-expression of your authentic self. This can have far-reaching impact on your health.

**Consequence 5** – Your stress has a ripple effect at home, on your loved ones.

If, however, you choose to speak up despite the risk– it exhibits your leadership quality – your courage, ownership, authenticity. You make your presence felt. It conveys to your top management that you place your organizational interest above your own. It also conveys to your team that you will stand up for what is right. People respect conviction. They admire and trust such a leader. And best of all, when you are aligned with who you are, there is a different quality to your overall well-being, peace, and joy.

## What do you choose– Speaking up or not?

Ask yourself today –

What prevents me from speaking up? What are the consequences of choosing silence?

How does it make you feel inside about you?

What is the worst that will happen if I do speak up?

| If you don't give yourself respect, no one else will give you respect.

You need to value yourself. Value what you bring to the table and the contribution you make.

Next, find your kind of environment. Try to be in the company of right people who appreciate honesty and uprightness.

And work on your [assertive communication](#) so that you can say the truth or speak your mind without ruffling any feathers. It is a skill. It can be learned and practiced.

At A Brighter Life, we support leaders in their journey to build their [executive presence and communicate assertively](#), thus accelerating their leadership growth.

Feel free to [connect with us](#) in case you want to move forward in your journey to speak up assertively.

Found this article helpful? Do share with someone in your team who needs to speak up more.

I will soon be sharing tips on building assertiveness. Stay connected.

Yoshita Swarup Sharma:

**Founder & CEO - A Brighter Life | ICF Certified Executive Coach | Leadership facilitator | NLP Practitioner| Inner Transformation Specialist**

Yoshita Swarup Sharma, CEO & Co-Founder of A Brighter Life, is an internationally certified executive coach (PCC). For the last eleven years, she has coached several senior leaders and CXO across the variety of industries and organizations. Recently she was awarded as one of the most influential coaching leaders of India by the World HRD Congress. She's a leadership facilitator, advanced NLP Practitioner and a specialist on personal transformation. She writes her blog from her own experiences and reflections . She brings with her 23 years of overall work experience and has previously worked as a Marketing professional in corporates like Coca-Cola, Dabur and Ranbaxy She's also a Kathak student and co-founder of Subah, A Covid Widow support group

Contact [Yoshita Swarup Sharma](#)

Get in touch with us [here](#)

