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# Stop Being a Placeholder, Claim Your Spot at the Table

Sharon Delaney McCloud

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## Stop Being a Placeholder, Claim Your Spot at the Table

Do you like watching TED Talks?

I hope so. I'm a huge fan. In fact, I think it's fair to say I'm obsessed. As a lifelong learner, TED Talks fuel my curiosity on a wide variety of topics. But what I realized while learning about astronomy, bees, urban design and other subjects is that I'm also studying how these speakers present.

Did you know that most TED speakers are NOT professional communicators? They're usually ordinary people with extraordinary ideas. Their content drives them to share transformational concepts that mitigates whatever nerves they have about public speaking. Surely, you've heard of *glossophobia*, or a fear of public speaking. It's really common and affects up to 75% of the population. Some people may feel nervous at the very thought of public speaking, while others experience full-on panic and fear. But you can overcome it, I promise. It takes deliberate effort and practice. I've seen it first-hand watching a plant scientist go from being paralyzed in front of a podium to speaking at a national Toastmasters competition in just two short years.

As professionals, you understand that harnessing the power of confident communication is crucial to your career growth. Leaders are expected to be able to share their vision with internal and external audiences, investors, media, etc. As members of a team, you have to collaborate with each other, clients, prospects and other stakeholders. That requires clear, effective messaging delivered in a way that moves people to action.

Rather than winging your next presentation or slapping together last-minute talking points, I'd encourage you to spend a little more time in the preparation. First, know your audience: Who are they? What do they want? What problem are you solving for them? Answering these questions will help you understand, connect and resonate with them.

Next, what's your purpose? If you took public speaking 101 in college, this will sound familiar. Most presentations and talks are designed to inform, persuade, motivate or entertain. At work, you're often times doing several of these at once: informing, persuading and motivating people to take action on something. Keep that front and center when designing your content.

### Message Development

Getting disciplined on what you'll say and show on slides is a constant pursuit. If you're longwinded and want to include all the details, you might lose your audience. But if you don't give enough, your presentation may come off as surface level and lacking in depth. This is a fine line and requires you to practice in front of a co-worker or trusted ally so you can get honest feedback.

### Think about *how* you communicate

One of my favorite quotes from Maya Angelou:

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

You could spend all the time in the world perfecting your talking points, but all of that could go sideways if you don't pay extra attention to how you deliver those words. Your body language, vocal delivery and content need to work congruently if you want your message to land the way you intend.

As Julian Treasure shared in his TED Talk that's been viewed more than 55 million times,

“The human voice: It’s the instrument we all play. It’s the most powerful sound in the world, probably. It’s the only one that can start a war or say “I love you.”

I mean...come on. If that doesn’t give you all the feels like it does me, we need to chat. 😊

## Amplify

Humans are wired for connection and good communication is the conduit to make that happen. Words matter. How and when we use them matters. But what happens when you feel like you don’t have the space to speak up? To contribute when the opportunity presents itself.

That’s exactly what went on in President Barack Obama’s first term in the White House. The majority of staffers in 2008 were men. They had worked on the campaign and were now rewarded with positions of influence. National Security Advisor Susan Rice described how she and other women had to shoulder their way into important conversations: “It’s not pleasant to have to appeal to a man to say, ‘Include me in that meeting,’ says Rice. And even when they’d made it into the room, the women were sometimes overlooked.

Female staffers came up with a solution they call amplification to remedy the problem. If you haven’t heard about this strategy yet, take notes from Rice:

“When a woman made a key point, other women would repeat it, giving credit to its author. This forced the men in the room to recognize the contribution — and denied them the chance to claim the idea as their own.”

Guess what? It works. Seriously. With repetition, women at the White House reported being called upon more often, and their voices were being heard. This works not only for women but for **anyone** who shies away from speaking up when the opportunity arises. Introverts, colleagues from underrepresented communities - anyone who feels their ideas don’t deserve the same attention and consideration as others.

Amplification is just one plan of action you could start using today to make a positive change at your workplace. Other things you can do include polishing your presentation skills. Knowing how to deliver a message with confidence and poise. Staying on point. Steering the conversation the way you intend.

It’s time to claim your seat at the table, just like Dr. Rice did. Imagine what might happen when your ideas and contributions are heard. This extends way beyond the workplace. You can impact every part of your life when you feel confident with your communication.



### About Sharon Delaney McCloud, CDE®

Sharon Delaney McCloud is an Emmy Award-winning broadcaster, TEDx speaker, author, adjunct professor, Certified Diversity Executive, and corporate trainer who helps teams improve their communication and executive presence to drive business results. From national conferences to Fortune 500 boardrooms to leadership retreats, Sharon focuses on helping people move hearts and minds. [SharonDelaney.tv](https://www.SharonDelaney.tv). [Hear Sharon speak at the 2023 AENC Annual Meeting in Winston-Salem, NC on Tuesday, July 25th.](#)

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