

# FIND YOUR VOICE AT WORK

Speaking up can be intimidating, but proving you have something smart to say commands respect...and is crucial to your advancement. Follow these pointers from **Lauren Maillian**, entrepreneur, author, and costar of Oxygen's *Quit Your Day Job*.

BY JUDITH OHIKUARE



## SHOWCASE YOUR STRENGTHS

I was a teenage model, so I learned a lot about business and brand management at an early age. By the time I was 21, I had my own wine company and oversaw everything from web strategy to operations—but I worried I wouldn't be taken seriously by my much older counterparts. Since I thought my age might keep someone from fully appreciating my professional value, I made sure to play up my accomplishments and show that I was resourceful and

smart enough to succeed. That's when people started respecting me.

## LEAD WITH FACTS

There have been times in my career when I've wanted to make a decision based on gut sense alone but I didn't speak up. I knew that saying "this doesn't feel right" wouldn't fly (especially because people often expect women to be impulsive, then backtrack later). When I get a hunch, I do a little digging until I have concrete information to back up my instincts. If you want to be convincing, you have to show that your arguments are sound.

## TAILOR YOUR MESSAGE

Sometimes we're so concerned with moving at the speed of culture that we think, *Quick! Quick! Quick!* But if you focus on speed alone, you increase the chances of being misconstrued and might miss out on an opportunity to truly shine. Pay attention to how people write e-mails: One person might use smiley faces and phrases like "Ciao, talk soon." Another might use full paragraphs and sign off with "Best regards." It's all about adapting your message. That doesn't mean you change who you are, but for example, even now, the way I speak to my friends in mar-

keting is different from the way I speak to someone in private equity. Stop and process before firing off a reply.

## CHANNEL YOUR BOSS

One of the hardest things I've had to learn is that I can't do everything. That means I need to understand and trust the people I surround myself with. From a hiring standpoint, I'm most interested in how people operate when I'm not available. Ask yourself: *How does my boss prioritize? How does she make decisions in a crisis?* I want to know how you'd deal in my absence and how you perform under pressure. ■



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