



By: Jia Wu

Often, employees will disagree with a supervisor's directives yet execute blindly with little apprehension. In organizations that clearly delineate authorities, it may not be considered appropriate for subordinates to violate orders - unless immoral, illegal, or unethical. Your supervisor's demeanor, authority, or position within the organization will undeniably influence your decision to speak up. However, it is important to recognize that the choice to speak up is ultimately up to **you**. Understanding your own motives and intentions are just as important in finding the courage to speak up as rehearsing ways to convey your opinion.

I'm sure many of us have come across leadership articles discussing how to psychoanalyze your bosses or audience to find an appropriate opportunity to speak up. However, no amount of energy spent strategizing will accurately predict your supervisor's reaction each time. [Even though you won't be able to predict the specifics of every situation, creating a plan for how to speak up can significantly increase the likelihood that you do so when the moment presents itself.](#) The more you are self-aware of your intentions, the easier it will be to find your candid voice in the face of supervisor-employee disagreements or conflicts.

Understanding what values and principles are important to you is critical in finding your

voice when engaging in conversations with your supervisor. Are you intimidated by your supervisor? Are you concerned that your job will be impacted by speaking up? If questioning how things have been done is threatening, does that tell you anything? We naturally want to discuss topics that are important to us. However, there are times we tend to value our reputation or status in an organization more than having our opinions heard. Other times, we value what others will think of us after we speak up more than our own opinions. The critical question is whether you value advocacy of your thoughts, or thoughts of others, more than that of your supervisor. The more you understand what is important to you, the easier speaking up will become.

The effects of silent opposition over time not only stifles your voice in the moment but also the growth of long-term self-confidence. In the face of opposition between supervisors and employees, the first step to resolution of conflicts is to speak up. Does your workplace culture drive your decision to speak up, or do you?

Here are some ways I've found to effectively ease into uncomfortable conversations:

- Consider inquiring how your supervisor derived his or her decision to open up room for conversation.
- Ask questions to seek clarification on their guidance to lead into commentaries.
- Associate previous experiences with the task at-hand to open your boss and yourself to dialogue. Create opportunities for your supervisor to get to know you.

The only regret we have is the question we did not ask, or the things we did not say when it mattered to us the most. When you value your own opinions more than those of others, you will find the courage to speak up.

Jia Wu is an MI Captain and current company commander. She aspires to challenge people to have the difficult conversations in order to grow personally and professionally.

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