

## **TLP Five-Minute Read Over Coffee – Contributing with confidence to international meetings**

You are a member of an international meeting - struggling (with other colleagues) to understand everything that is said by native speakers.

As explored in Part 1 - a lot of responsibility rests with the chair of the meeting and the native speakers themselves. However, as a participant you also have a key role to play. Central to this is my belief that it is often not language that blocks us but rather a type of fear of 'being found out.'

### **What can you do?**

- 1) **Make friends with imperfection.** There is a fundamental point here about being ok with being imperfect and making mistakes. This mindset is much easier to identify than implement and forms the essence of my coaching work helping you to unblock.
- 2) Understand that questions can be asked in a way that does not need to make you look 'stupid' or loose credibility. One insight I have from my work is that it is often the most high-performing people that have the confidence to ask 'simple' questions. They also recognize that if they don't understand, many others might not either.
- 3) **Slowing the pace down.** A tactful request to slow down the speed of native speakers can be invaluable; '*would you mind slowing down a little?*', '*if you could slow down a little that would be great*'. Notice the use of little softening expressions such as 'a little' can take the directness out of the intervention.
- 4) There are also ways of saying that you don't understand something that can express confidence and professionalism.
  - *Could you repeat that please?*
  - *Would you mind saying that again?*
  - *Would it be possible to explain the last point again?*

- *Could you go over that one more time?*

**Note:** Some of my clients want to 'fall on their sword' and apologise for their bad English before asking for clarification. I always challenge this. Powerful communication is simple and generous to your audience and when a message does not get across - it often says as much or more about the speaker than the listener.

5) **Staying light and positive.** Again, easier said than done. There is a type of critical voice that can hijack your capacity to speak and listen in a meeting. It can easily spiral out of control.

**Trigger** - 'I do not fully understand what he is saying' - **Conclusion** - 'My English is terrible - I am not credible in this meeting' (**result: you are now blocked and no longer really listening**).

I often experience the triggers for this type of thought pattern in French. It is in that second phase – 'my French is terrible - I am not credible' - that I try and take a deep breath and remind myself that effective communication has everything to do with **positive intention, being human** and nothing to do with **perfection**. I also remind myself that my audience probably have lots of other stuff going on in their heads - rather than to simply wait for Toby to crash in French!

Breaking these negative spirals requires lots of practice and persistence and a little bit of creativity as well. However, I have seen how my clients can unblock and it can have a transformative impact on the ease and flow you feel in meetings.

I hope that has been useful and if you any questions, please do contact me – [toby@tlp.lu](mailto:toby@tlp.lu).