



10 COMMON PHRASES THAT WASTE TIME AND KILL MORALE (& what leaders should say instead)

By SHANE HIPPS

You've heard the expression that "Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Nothing could be further from the truth. Words create worlds. They have the power to start wars or they can comfort the grieving. Thoughtless words can end relationships in an instant. Well-crafted words can inspire people to a more powerful imagination of the future and act for change.

Learning to leverage the power of language is critical task of leadership. The way a leader communicates can make the difference between success and failure. Most leaders have no idea how a thoughtless comment can end up costing productive hours and kill morale in a team. Or how a consciously chosen sentence could inspire creativity, profit, and impact in ways you never thought possible.

A railway switch is a small lever that makes a very big difference in the direction of a train. It's the mechanism that determines the train's destination. In the same way, our chosen words function like rail "Switches." When a verbal Switch is thrown it can alter the direction and destination of a conversation, either for better or worse.

One poorly placed comment can trigger a reaction in others that we don't know notice. Switches are often subtle. The conductor won't even see if a switch occurred at first. But give it enough distance and our original destination is nowhere in sight. The good news is you can always throw another switch and get things moving in the right direction.

The trick is knowing what to say. I encourage leaders to learn basic language patterns to make sure they avoid sending conversations off the intended rails. I also suggest removing words from your vocabulary. Phrases like "No offense, but..." or "With all due respect..." are triggers for most people. The real purpose these phrases serve is to offend and disrespect others.

At other times, it means learning new language patterns. Below are the ten most common phrases that can derail conversations and associated Switches designed to produce better outcomes. You can literally memorize these or use them as inspiration to create your own.

	COMPLAINT	SWITCH #1	SWITCH #2
1	"I COMPLETELY DISAGREE WITH YOU"	<i>"Let me push back a little."</i>	<i>"I think about that differently, tell me more."</i>
2	"YOU'RE NOT LISTENING TO ME"	<i>"I'm not being very clear, let me try again."</i>	<i>"It feels like I'm not getting a fair hearing."</i>
3	"LET ME FINISH."	<i>"Is it ok if I complete my thought?"</i>	<i>"I'd like to land my thought, are you able to make some space for that?"</i>
4	"STOP BEING A JERK."	<i>"This matters a lot to you. I'd like to hear you better. That will happen if you take a different approach."</i>	<i>"I'm not going to be constructive in this conversation. Let's bracket it and come back to it later."</i>
5	"YOU MICRO-MANAGE TOO MUCH."	<i>"What behavior or information do you need from me to help establish trust?"</i>	<i>"Your people depend on your strategic thinking, what could you release to make space for that?"</i>
6	"I DON'T TRUST YOU."	<i>"I could be wrong, but there seems to be a gap between what I heard you say and what I see happening."</i>	<i>"Seems like we keep crossing wires. It might help us function better if we connect more often."</i>
7	"YOU DON'T COMMUNICATE."	<i>"I'd like to stay aligned with you. What's the best way to communicate with you?"</i>	<i>"I'm wondering if you could help me understand?"</i>
8	"YOU ARE TOO FOCUSED ON THE NEGATIVE."	<i>"I can see the challenges with you on this idea, can you also see the merits of the idea?"</i>	<i>"You have a gift for anticipating problems if things go wrong. Can you also anticipate the problems when things go well?"</i>
9	"YOU ARE TOO PASSIVE."	<i>"I would love to see you take up more space in the room and show us your passion."</i>	<i>"I like it when you stand your ground and express your truth."</i>
10	"YOU TALK TOO MUCH."	<i>"This may be a time to turn up your sonar mode and dial back the broadcast mode."</i>	<i>"Would it be ok if I heard some perspectives from others?"</i>

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