

By Steve Tobak

More people get into trouble by opening up their mouths than any other way. Don't believe me? Think about all the times you've screwed up in your career, or even in your personal life, and think about the most common cause.

Okay, so actions count a lot too. I get it. But you have to admit, what you say and how you say it carries a lot of weight in life. And it can make all the difference in your career and your business.

Unfortunately, most of us weren't born with the management communications gene nor had the benefit of an executive coach to mentor us on the finer points of "soft skills." Looking back at the early days of my management career, it's almost shocking how demeaning and arrogant I sounded at times.

You know what I'm talking about. You know how it feels when it happens to you. You show up at your boss's door with a cheery, "Hi there; got a minute?"

- He slowly looks up from his desk and in a steely tone says, "What is it now?"
- Or worse, he's got that annoyed look on his face, as if to say, "What the hell is an insignificant gnat like you doing bothering an important big-shot like me?"

The truth is that managers who act that way are shooting their own careers in the foot. Nothing demoralizes and demeans employees or causes customers and investors to lose confidence and run for the hills faster than when an executive acts like a rude, self-important jerk who thinks he's God's gift to business.

Now, I'm not saying you should sugarcoat how you feel, be apologetic when you're not, or use politically correct euphemisms like "with all due respect" all the time. That does more harm than good. But you can be genuine, honest, and straightforward without sounding like a self-centered, disrespectful moron.

Here are 10 phrases that, when used in the proper context (which I'm sure you can figure out), will enable you to expediently get to the heart of an issue while showing genuine respect for the other person's perspective.

1: "You may be right, but here's how I see it..."

2: "Tell me what's working and what's not working."

3: "What do you think we should be doing differently?"

4: "Give it to me straight; no BS."

5: "Please don't tell me what ___ thinks; I'd like to know what you think."

6: "What does your gut tell you?"

7: "How can I help you?"

8: "That may be true, but look at it this way... "

9: "Don't worry; I've got plenty of time."

10: "How would you do it?"

Beyond words

Of course, how you act should match your speech. Great leaders behave in a relaxed and confident manner and never take themselves too seriously. The object is to set the other person at ease. When you're with someone else, you should:

- Give your full undivided attention.
- Let your sense of humor shine through.
- Show some humility, as opposed to arrogance.

And never, ever accept a phone call or an interruption unless it's a true emergency. If you're expecting an important call or have an upcoming appointment, let the other person know in advance.

Sure, there's a knack to this sort of thing. But once you get the hang of it, you'll be amazed at the effect these skills will have on your career and your business.

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