10 Things Extraordinary People Say Every Day

BY JEFF HADEN | SMALL BUSINESS

Want to make a huge difference in someone’s life? Here are things you should say every day to your employees, colleagues, family members, friends, and everyone you care about:

“Here’s what I’m thinking.”

You’re in charge, but that doesn’t mean you’re smarter, sawier, or more insightful than everyone else. Back up your statements and decisions. Give reasons. Justify with logic, not with position or authority.

Though taking the time to explain your decisions opens those decisions up to discussion or criticism, it also opens up your decisions to improvement.

Authority can make you “right,” but collaboration makes everyone right—and makes everyone pull together.

“I was wrong.”

I once came up with what I thought was an awesome plan to improve overall productivity by moving a crew to a different shift on an open production line. The inconvenience to the crew was considerable, but the payoff seemed worth it. On paper, it was perfect.

In practice, it wasn’t.

So, a few weeks later, I met with the crew and said, “I know you didn’t think this would work, and you were right. I was wrong. Let’s move you back to your original shift.”

I felt terrible. I felt stupid. I was sure I’d lost any respect they had for me.

It turns out I was wrong about that, too. Later one employee said, “I didn’t really know you, but the fact you were willing to admit you were wrong told me everything I needed to know.”

When you’re wrong, say you’re wrong. You won’t lose respect—you’ll gain it.

“That was awesome.”

No one gets enough praise. No one. Pick someone—pick anyone—who does or did something well and say, “Wow, that was great how you...”

And feel free to go back in time. Saying “Earlier, I was thinking about how you handled that employee issue last month...” can make just as positive an impact today as it would have then. (It could even make a bigger impact, because it shows you still remember what happened last month, and you still think about it.)

Praise is a gift that costs the giver nothing but is priceless to the recipient. Start praising. The people around you will love you for it—and you’ll like yourself a little better, too.

“You’re welcome.”

Think about a time you gave a gift and the recipient seemed uncomfortable or awkward. Their reaction took away a little of the fun for you, right?

The same thing can happen when you are thanked or complimented or praised. Don’t
Don't let thanks, congratulations, or praise be all about you. Make it about the other person, too.

"Can you help me?"

When you need help, regardless of the type of help you need or the person you need it from, just say, sincerely and humbly, "Can you help me?"

I promise you'll get help. And in the process you'll show vulnerability, respect, and a willingness to listen—which, by the way, are all qualities of a great leader.

And all qualities of a great friend.

"I'm sorry."

We all make mistakes, so we all have things we need to apologize for: words, actions, omissions, failing to step up, step in, show support...

Say you're sorry.

But never follow an apology with a disclaimer like "But I was really mad, because..." or "But I did think you were..." or any statement that in any way places even the smallest amount of blame back on the other person.

Say you're sorry, say why you're sorry, and take all the blame. No less. No more.

Then you both get to make the freshest of fresh starts.

"Can you show me?"

Advice is temporary; knowledge is forever. Knowing what to do helps, but knowing how or why to do it means everything.

When you ask to be taught or shown, several things happen: You implicitly show you respect the person giving the advice; you show you trust his or her experience, skill, and insight; and you get to better assess the value of the advice.

Don't just ask for input. Ask to be taught or trained or shown.

Then you both win.

"Let me give you a hand."

Many people see asking for help as a sign of weakness. So, many people hesitate to ask for help.

But everyone needs help.

Don't just say, "Is there anything I can help you with?" Most people will give you a version of the reflexive "No, I'm just looking" reply to sales clerks and say, "No, I'm all right."

Be specific. Find something you can help with. Say "I've got a few minutes. Can I help you finish that?" Offer in a way that feels collaborative, not patronizing or gratuitous. Model the behavior you want your employees to display.

Then actually roll up your sleeves and help.

"I love you."

No, not at work, but everywhere you mean it—and every time you feel it.

Nothing.

Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing. If you're upset, frustrated, or angry, stay quiet. You may think venting will make you feel better, but it never does.

That's especially true where your employees are concerned. Results come and go, but feelings are forever. Criticize an employee in a group setting and it will seem like he eventually got over it, but inside, he never will.

Before you speak, spend more time considering how employees will think and feel than you do evaluating whether the decision makes objective sense. You can easily recover from a mistake made because of faulty data or inaccurate projections.

You'll never recover from the damage you inflict on an employee's self-esteem.

Be quiet until you know exactly what to say—and exactly what affect your words will have.
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