

5 POWERFUL PHRASES FOR DIFFICULT DISCUSSIONS

By Liz Uram



Do you ever come up with your best responses an hour after a conversation has ended? Do you ever say to yourself “I wish I would have said...” or “I wish I wouldn’t have said...”? Do you ever get tongue-tied when you are put on the spot?

If you can relate to any of these situations you can improve your confidence by adding a handful of powerful phrases to your skill kit.

People who communicate with confidence are calm and in control. They strive to be positive and helpful in order to get a good result that benefits everyone. However, it can be hard to keep your cool if you aren’t equipped with the right tools. You might avoid saying the things you should or say things you wish you hadn’t.

Here are 5 of the most powerful phrases to add to your skill kit so you can communicate like a boss in every situation:

1) **“That sounds really hard.”**

Whether it’s the co-worker who vents non-stop about their job, the friend who goes on and on about their relationship problems, or the employee who complains about how overworked they are, they have one thing in common - they don’t want your advice. They aren’t telling you about their problem because they want a solution. They just want you to listen. They are looking for empathy, not advice.

It can be difficult to listen to problems without giving a solution, especially when you know exactly what they should do. Trying to convince them that you have the answer will only lead to frustration and a potential argument.

Resist the temptation to tell them what to do and try saying “That sounds really hard” instead. You’ll find that pulling a phrase like this will validate the other person’s feelings and help them move on.

2) **“What are you going to do about it?”**

After you have expressed empathy, follow up with a question such as “What are you going to do about it?” Most people know what they should do and by nature they will put more energy into their own ideas than yours. Don’t waste your time telling people what to do. Avoid any statement that starts with “You should” or “You have to.” Instead ask them what they think.

This will also reveal whether they have any interest in solving the problem or if they just want to continue complaining. If you sense that they aren’t interested in solving the problem, then you may have to distance yourself. However, if it’s a direct report you will have to deal with it. Negative attitudes are contagious. See #4 for how to address a negative attitude.

3) "I agree."

This short, powerful phrase will stop an argument in its tracks. It's nearly impossible to argue with someone who is agreeing with you (although some people will try). There is little upside to arguing your point with anyone.

For example, say a team member didn't complete their work for the day and when you ask them why not they say "There's too much work. We're too busy. I can't do everything around here." Simply say "I agree. It has been really busy around here."

Once you've agreed then you can follow up with the expected job performance. "I agree, it has been really busy lately. However, you know that our promise to our customers is that every order will be processed same day."

4) "I need your agreement."

Dealing with performance issues can be challenging and given a choice, many managers prefer the 'wait and see' approach. That usually doesn't work. When someone isn't meeting performance or behavior standards a coaching conversation is needed to help the team member get back on track.

The one and only goal of a coaching conversation is to get the team member to agree to improve their performance or behavior. Because many managers don't have this phrase in their skill kit they never come out and clearly state what they want.

Behavioral issues, such as negative attitudes, can be especially challenging but they must be addressed if you are going to put an end to negativity in the workplace. Chronic negativity is a drain on the bottom line and risk losing your top performers if you allow bad attitudes to go unchecked.

Don't avoid having these difficult conversations, there is too much at stake. Say "I need your agreement that you will maintain a professional, respectful attitude in the workplace." And then hold them to it.

5) "I noticed..."

The words you use to start off a potentially difficult conversation are the key to a positive or negative outcome. When addressing a performance issue you'll have the best outcome if you focus on the observable behavior rather than on the person. Keep in mind that the principles of good communication include being positive and helpful.

For example, when addressing an attitude issue try saying, "I noticed that you don't seem like yourself lately." Not, "What's wrong with you?"

If you choose the wrong the words and the other person immediately gets defensive you might as well end the conversation and come back to it later.

Be aware that even if you use all the right words and say all the right things, there is no guarantee that the other person will respond in the same professional way. That's okay. Communicating like a boss is about taking ownership of what you do and say regardless of the outcome. You are responsible for making the effort. You are not responsible for how the other person chooses to react.

These five phrases will help you remain calm, confident, and in control in all situations. Take them out and use them. The more you use them the more comfortable you'll get and soon you will be communicating like a boss.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Liz Uram is a nationally-recognized speaker, trainer, consultant, and author. She equips leaders with the tools they need to communicate like a boss so they can make a bigger impact, get better results, and motivate others to do their best. With 20 years of experience, she's developed systems that work. Uram's written four books packed full of strategies leaders can implement to get real results, real fast. For more information, please [visit www.lizuram.com](http://www.lizuram.com)