

## Here are 7 things a good leader should never say to employees:

1. **“I’m in charge, so this is what we’re going to do.”** Dealing with different opinions or even open dissent is challenging for any leader and can make you feel defensive and insecure. When that happens you might be tempted to fall back on the golden rule: She who has the gold makes the rules. Don’t. Everyone knows you’re in charge; saying you are, instantly destroys any feelings of collaboration, teamwork, and esprit de corps (common feeling or spirit). When you can’t back up a decision with data or logic, possibly that decision isn’t the right decision. Don’t be afraid to back down and be wrong, it happens to everyone. Employees respect you even more when you admit you make a mistake.
2. **“I have a great opportunity for you.”** No, you don’t; you just want the employee to agree to take on additional work or the project no one wants. If you say, “Mary, next week I’m assigning you to work on a new project with our best customer,” she immediately knows it’s a great opportunity. If you say, “Mary, I have a great opportunity for you; next week I’m assigning you to sort out the problems in our warehouse,” she knows she just got stuck with a less-than-plum assignment. Any opportunity that really is great requires no preface or setup. Don’t sell.
3. **“Man, this has been a long day. I’ll see you guys. It’s time for me to get out of here.”** No employee wants to feel your pain. From your perspective, running a business can be stressful, draining, and overwhelming. From the employee’s perspective you have it made because you make all the rules. Don’t expect employee empathy; instead talk about how today was challenging and everyone pulled together, or how you really appreciate that employee’s help.
4. **“Hey, that’s a great idea — and if we do it this way...”** Successful people often try too hard to add value (unsuccessful people do too, by the way.) You may be able to improve an employee’s idea and lay out a specific path for implementation, but in the process you kill their enthusiasm. Instead, say, “Hey, that’s a great idea,” then ask questions: How they came up with the idea, the data or reasoning they used, how they think the idea should be implemented, etc. In the process the employee may identify small tweaks on her own, and if not you can gently guide him in the right direction. The best ideas, from an employee’s point of view, are not your ideas. The best ideas are always *their* ideas, and rightfully so. Make sure employees’ ideas stay their ideas, and everyone benefits.

5. **“No.”** Actually, “no” can be okay — as long as it is always followed with an explanation. Still, better choices are “I don’t think we can, and here’s why...” or “I would like to, but here’s why we can’t...” or “That sounds like a great idea, but we’ll need to do a couple of things first...” Explain, explain, explain: As a leader, explaining is near the top of your job description.
  
6. **“I can’t wait to go to Cancun next week.”** Don’t assume your employees will be inspired by and hope to emulate your success. They won’t. Leave your Porsche in the garage. Many employees resent how “good” the owners/managers have it — at the expense of underpaid employees. Is resenting your success, even if you don’t flaunt it, fair? No. Is it a real issue for some employees? Absolutely.
  
7. **“We.”** This one is conditional: Use “we” when it fits, but never use the royal “we.” There needs to be a real sense of teamwork before “we” comes naturally and teamwork actions speak louder than theoretically inclusive words. Employees *know* when you are paying lip service to “we.”