

Deadly Phrases Managers Use

25 Deadly Words & Phrases Every Manager Must Eliminate

Everything we do and don't do sends a message about us to our Team Members. Effective Managers understand this. Our challenge as Managers is consciously decide what we should say to motivate our Team Members. Language is a critical Motivation component. The right words help empower Team Members, while the wrong words can de-motivate and frustrate our Teams.

Since early childhood we have heard negative words and phrases – from our family, our teachers and leaders in our youth groups. From very early on we all have heard

- √ “NO”,
- √ “Stop”,
- √ “Don't”,
- √ “Be Quiet”
- √ “Sit Still”
- √ “Why weren't you listening?”
- √ “That was pretty stupid”

...and these phrases were often the first to show up in our early language choices. THE CHALLENGE: These type of language choices are top down in nature. Their very intent is all about WHO HAS THE POWER. If we heard these words and phrases frequently directed at us in our youth, and if we were embarrassed or lost face by them, one of three basic behavioral response patterns will emerge in our adult life;

- Don't speak or contribute until you are very clear of the facts,
- Sound unsure,
- Seek center stage at all costs.

As a manager, it is critical to identify which of these DEADLY PHRASES you use and adjust to fit the situation. If your intent is to motivate and empower your Team, language can play a key part in making that happen. Let's first start with the definition of motivation.

WHAT IS MOTIVATION

Motivation, a complex topic to be sure. For our purposes, we need to start with some basic premises.

- Premise #1:** *You can't motivate people.* Behavioral scientist document that an individual will not perform unless "they want to," or, unless it is in their interest to.
- Premise #2:** *All people are motivated.* Even a person who impersonates a vegetable on the couch is motivated. He's motivated to vegetate. Behavioral scientists have proven that all behaviors are motivated. Recognizing this fact, our best option is to look for the individual motivation already existent in people.
- Premise #3:** *People are motivated for their reasons, not ours.* Their reasons may not seem appropriate from your perspective, and yours may not seem appropriate from theirs, but knowing that people have their own ambitions and drives that incite them to action can give us insights for positioning our solutions.

Every person is motivated by something. And yes, negativity is a form of motivation. Yet, most research indicates that negative motivation is not empowering and may result in no action or undesired action. Let's look at phrases that are DEADLY and may definitely be DE-MOTIVATORS!

Challenging Phrases

“Yes *BUT*”

“However”

“Duh”

“You need to understand”

“Just do it my way”

In our adult life and especially at work, a challenging phrase is just that, it creates negative energy during a conversation and sets up a challenging environment – one that communicates an intent **the manager did not intend**.

As a manager, it is our responsibility to be very clear what our INTENT IS. What message do we really want to send to our team member?

Possible Negative Interpretations of **Challenging Phrases**:

- √ Put Downs
- √ Team Member is not valued
- √ Team Member is stupid
- √ Team Member is out of touch
- √ Team Member should find another job

Manager SAID	Team Member FELT
“Yes, BUT”	Gosh, I guess what I said meant nothing, she’s already arguing again.
“However”	I guess the manager did not hear my point.
“DUH’	I must really be stupid, probably should not talk any more.
“You need to understand’	NO, YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND, you are not listening to me.
“Just do it my way”	I am NOT you...your way will not work for me, you don’t know me anyway.

Faulty Referencing

"That will never work here."

"That's not our style"

"The VP will never buy that."

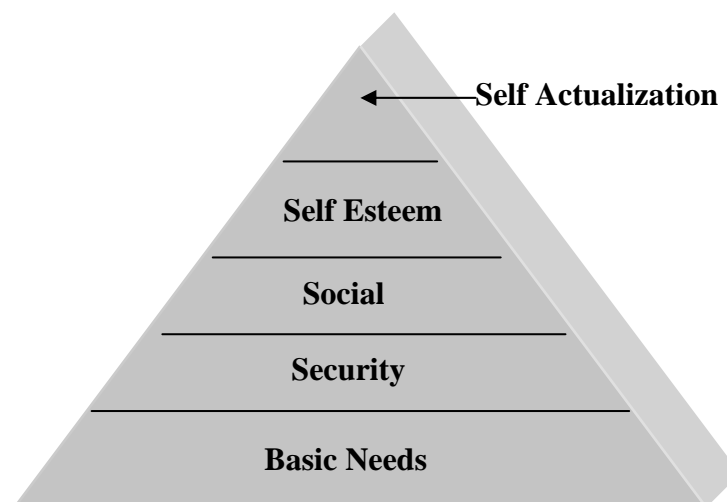
"I would not say that too loud, the walls have ears"

"We've never done it that way"

"We tried that before and it failed"

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Psychologist, Abraham Professional Maslow has made one of the greatest contributions to motivation theory with his **Hierarchy of Needs** model. **Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs Model** clearly describes what happens when the human psyche is put under stress. If the stress is at its greatest we feel our very survival may be at risk and what may get communicated sounds like the sender is "circling the wagons" for a very long siege to protect their basic needs and very survival.



Self-Actualization:

This is at the top of the pyramid The need to derive satisfaction from one's work; express oneself, be creative; the sense that one is offering value in the world.

Esteem:

The desire for self-respect and the good opinion of others.

Social:

The need for love, affection, and sense of belonging.

Safety:

Protection against danger and threats from the environment or people.

Physiological

This is at the base of the pyramid needs for basics such as food, water, and shelter.

Maslow believed that people must satisfy physiological needs first, and then, when those are achieved, the next level becomes primary, and so on through the hierarchy. This explains, for example, why a talented and capable manager might turn down a promotion to executive level, stating that he likes his present job too much.

Maslow explains that he likes his present job because he feels secure in it, and that counts more to him than status and respect of others; his *safety* needs take precedence over his *esteem* needs. This scenario points out that people operate in accordance with *their perceived self interests*. Another person might be motivated to accept the promotion, even though it involves risk, because his or her *esteem* needs for admiration and prestige, make it worthwhile to accept.

RISK TOLERANCE IS THE KEY. If one is at their max level of stress and view the world and anything NEW as very RISKY, their first response is always “NO.” The reality is, “NO” does not always mean “NO”. The response is often more a reflection of their stress level. If the sender can take away the RISK, the receiver will move up the triangle and respond differently.

Other Shades of “NO”

- “That will never work here.”
- “That’s not our style”
- “The VP will never buy that.”
- “I would not say that too loud, the walls have ears”
- “We’ve never done it that way”
- “We tried that before and it failed”
- “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

Manager SAID	Team Member FELT
“That will never work here”	Why not. It worked where I used to work...you folks must be scared.
“That’s not our style”	Yea, your style is way out of sync with what is happening in the world.
“The VP will never buy that”	Are you kidding, the VP must have her head in the ground, this makes sense.
I would not say that too loud, the walls have ears”	I must be working for BIG BROTHER now, are they recording everything?
“We’ve never done it that way”	...and it shows. This place is not going to survive if we do not change.
“We tried that before and it failed”	...and who implemented it? Did you give it a chance?
“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”	This is the most un-innovative place I have every worked. I am bored.

Minimzing

"It isn't your responsibility"

"Stop Thinking."

"I think you missed the point."

"That did not grab me"

"Let me push back (devil's advocate)"

"That would be more trouble than it is worth"

"You and whose army?"

Language Continuum

Unsure	Neutral	Top Down
I think	From my point of view	That's policy
Maybe	From my experience	That is not our way
Well, sorta	From my research	That would never work
I feel	My perspective is	here
I will try	My viewpoint is	That is not your job

