



Four Motivational Phrases Used by Top Leaders Every Day

BY JOEL GARFINKLE

Caleb, a manager in his workplace, often found himself fumbling for words. He wanted to learn how to make the most of his daily interactions with employees, even the brief ones. He reached out to several mentors in leadership positions. “What are the most important things you say to your employees?” he asked.

Strong leaders use phrases that give employees a powerful motivational boost, his mentors said. These phrases aren’t just sprinkled into a conversation. Rather, they often guide the direction of a conversation by opening a space for authentic sharing of ideas and appreciation. These five phrases are the building blocks to positive relationships based on strong communication, Caleb’s mentors told him.

“YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES.”

It's crucial to let people know you believe in them. They need to feel confident in their abilities in order to fully apply themselves. Find ways each day to express your confidence in people. Encourage them to take risks when you believe they're likely to succeed, and to tackle ambitious projects.

“HOW DOES THAT WORK?”

This phrase resounds with humbleness, as well as the self-assurance to admit that you don't know everything. As a leader, it's vital to recognize that everyone possesses specific expertise and a distinct perspective. Knowing when to encourage them to share their expertise is an important skill for a leader. This is a good phrase to use in a meeting with more reserved team members who don't normally boast about their knowledge. When you

know they can explain something well that others will benefit from knowing, give them a confidence boost by asking this question.

“I'M IMPRESSED.”

This is one of the most important phrases used by leaders. When you take notice of others' skills or contributions, let them know. Be specific about what you admire about their talents and efforts. Sharing your appreciation will encourage them to continue making a strong effort in the future. Use this phrase in front of other employees or higher-ups so that others will take notice as well, making this simple phrase an even bigger motivation booster.

“WHAT DO YOU NEED?”

Asking what employees need in order to carry out their work effectively shows you want to be supportive



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of their efforts. It also reveals a high level of confidence in others. Rather than micromanaging how their work should be carried out, you're viewing them as the expert in how it should be done. A strong leader has the ability to play a supportive role by asking this question and following through. Posing this question in a more general way—in terms of how the workplace or job conditions could better meet employees' needs—may help reveal broader areas of need, such as [help with stress management](#) or budgeting time.

“WHAT IS YOUR VISION?”

Likewise, this question shows that you value the ideas of others. You want them to feel invested in their work. And you know they'll feel much more invested if they play a strong role in [designing their own work performance goals](#). During one-on-one meetings, you should also ask them about their vision for their career and how they plan to work toward it over the next several years. This will show that you care

about their career goals and will help you prepare talented team members for advancement.

Leaders who use these phrases are positioning themselves for advancement by [improving employees' job satisfaction](#) and getting the most of their people. “Write down these phrases and keep them somewhere handy, on your desk or wall,” one mentor told Caleb. “Make sure they're in a spot where you'll look at them often, so you'll have a continual reminder to use them. You'll soon use them without thinking about it, and it will feel more natural every day.” ■



Joel Garfinkle

Joel Garfinkle is acknowledged as one of the top 50 executive coaches in the United States. Global Gurus listed Joel 14th on the list of top thirty global coaching experts. He's worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Oracle, Google, Amazon, Deloitte, The Ritz-Carlton, Gap and Starbucks. He has written seven books, including [Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level](#). More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. If you [sign up](#), you'll receive the free e-book 41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!