

Application Guide

THE WORDS THAT MAKE OR BREAK YOUR LEADERSHIP



BOTTOM LINE:

Your words carry more weight than you think. They shape culture, impact emotional climate, and directly influence the motivation and mindset of your team.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- I. What you say, and what you don't say, shapes your team, your culture, and in many ways, your entire organization.
- II. You may not always feel the weight of your words, but the people around you, especially those who report to you, do.
 - A. The words we use can determine whether an employee feels valued and motivated or dismissed and discouraged.
 - B. There are no neutral words. Words are tools—and like any tool, they must be used intentionally.
- III. A leader's words weigh more because we all want affirmation and approval in life, but we want it more from the people we respect and look up to.
 - A. Leaders must steward their influence well.
 - B. Leaders should pay attention not only to what they say, but also to *how they say it*.
- IV. **Words shape culture and trust.** The words you use shape the foundation of an organization.
 - A. Culture isn't built through policies, perks, or mission statements. It's built by the tone set through how we communicate with one another.
 - B. How to begin using words to shape culture:
 1. **Audit your words.** Pay attention to the language you currently use.
 - a) Are you just responding to the culture you *already have* or are you using words that reflect the culture you *want*?
 - b) Listen to the questions you ask most—because those questions signal what you value. Make sure they align with your actual values.
 2. Use your words to **reinforce key values** you want repeated.
 - a) What's rewarded is repeated and our words can be rewards.
 - b) If you value risk taking, start celebrating failure as a learning opportunity. If you value collaboration, start praising collaborative efforts.
 - c) Leaders should be the loudest voice in the room as it relates to what's most important in the organization.
 3. **Don't settle for saying something once.** If it's important, reiterate it until you see it lived out in the organization.
- V. **Words are not equally weighted.** Negative words weigh more than positive ones.
 - A. Negativity Bias: Our brains are actually wired to hold onto negative experiences much longer than positive ones.
 - B. In workplace environments, it takes five to nine positive words to counteract just one negative comment.
 - C. Leaders need to make it a habit to notice and comment on the good.
 1. Work to build positive relational equity.
 2. When employees believe you have their best interest in mind, they will receive negative feedback and correction through a lens of trust and support rather than criticism.

Application Guide

THE WORDS THAT MAKE OR BREAK YOUR LEADERSHIP



VI. **Source determines weight.** Who says something will determine how it lands.

VII. **Intent is irrelevant.** What we meant by what we said is secondary to how it was received.

- A. When we tell someone they took our words the wrong way, we begin blaming them for feeling something in response to what we said.
- B. We have to take responsibility for *how* we said what we said.
 - 1. Apologize for what you say and move on.
 - 2. If you give an apology and then try to explain yourself, it will be received more as an excuse.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

- 1. What words has someone you looked up to in the past said that stuck with you?
- 2. Whose words carry the most weight for you? Who do your words carry more weight for?
- 3. Are your values being reflected in your language at work? If not, what could change?
- 4. What are some ways you can begin monitoring the words you use with those who report to you?
- 5. How can you regularly encourage those who report to you?

NEXT EPISODE

If you liked this episode, a great next listen would be: [The Importance of Trust in Leadership](#)

LEAVE A REVIEW

If this podcast has made you a better leader, you can help share it by leaving a quick Apple Podcasts review. You can visit [Apple Podcasts](#) or on your iOS device and then go to the “Reviews” section. Thank you for sharing!