

Language is Everything

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I continue to discover the power of language particularly from some recent experiences as a facilitator. I have spent the last six months working with one particular client on leadership development. What's been interesting about this experience is that no matter how long a person has been in a leadership role, or what industry language is everything. How we communicate, the words that we choose, and the non-verbal communication "cues" have such a profound impact on the quality of our relationships, the results or outcomes we achieve whether positive or negative, and the experiences we create for ourselves and others. This is not new news, but what's fascinating and worthy of discussion is the timeless nature of this aspect of work life and professional development.

For the purposes of this article I will focus on performance management. A significant component of the leadership development work that I am doing consists of helping leaders manage performance. This really becomes a lesson in human behavior and communication. At the end of the day, it's about how we have influenced peoples behavior to achieve desired results. Whether that's setting an example, setting expectations, coaching a person for success or providing feedback on area that may need further development. So what's my point, it comes back to language is everything.

Let me give you an example to illustrate my point. Let's take the common question, "What about the employee who has a "bad" attitude or it's his "personality"? I don't let managers "talk" attitude or personality. An attitude or a person's personality is displayed by particular behaviors, so that's what you have to "talk" to. In other words, what behaviors are you observing? Are they rude or curt to a customer, are they displaying body language that may be interpreted as stand offish, aggressive, or condescending? Telling a person they have a bad attitude isn't helping them understand what they may need to change or do differently? By being specific about the unacceptable behavior and the impact or consequence of that behavior you will make a difference in desired outcomes. It will always come back to language.

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