

Show real empathy, not fake concern

Most employees see through a boss who communicates like an actor playing a role. If you seem canned, you'll lose chances to build rapport and credibility.

Avoid making these hollow statements:

"I know it's tough." Unless you're in the trenches alongside your workers, then saying that you understand how hard it is for them—from your lofty perch—can trigger their resentment.

"I know how you feel." This comment may make an employee doubt whether you really know—or whether you're just saying so to sound sensitive. It's better to keep listening, nod occasionally and let the speaker reveal more.

"Let me guess: You want to ..." Some managers try to show off how well they understand their employees by pre-empting them. If you interrupt a worker who's about to open up to you, you disrupt the thought. Never play this guessing game, even if you're sure you're right.

"I know you can do it." The first time someone said this, it probably sounded great. Now employees often hear it as "We're done talking now."

To express your faith, be more specific. Examples: "I trust you to evaluate this thoroughly before deciding" or "I know you'll find a way to balance these conflicting goals."