

5 things never to say to employees (let alone kids)



"And stay in your cubicle until I say you can come out."

If you think about it, those hasty, canned responses to an underperforming employee are no different than the useless lines you might spew at a disobedient child. And how did that work out? Here are five to avoid:

"Who told you to do it that way?" Do you really want an answer to that? *Is* there an answer to that? If not, then don't ask. Either you're insinuating that there's another boneheaded employee loose in your organization giving out wrong information to people ("Clare in accounting told me"), or it's a rhetorical question designed to make the person feel stupid. "Who told you to do it that way" is denigrating to someone who maybe is trying to do it a better way but is missing the mark. Don't be quick to dismiss the attempt.

"Because I said so." These people who work for you aren't your bedroom door-slamming children. "Because I said so" tells your employee that your directives and orders should never be questioned. It also becomes obvious to the employee that you're masking the fact that you don't have a reason, or if you do, it's not a good one.

"Don't argue with me." Why? Because you might lose? It's a quick, but juvenile way to get the last word in a short exchange, or to prevent one from even starting in the first place. This phrase tells your worker that the conversation is over, get back to work. You should never assume that the employee's intent was to start an argument; maybe he or she has a point worth listening to.

"How many times do I have to tell you?" Yes, you may wonder how many times you have to repeat something to an employee, but this rhetorical question should never be asked. For one, if an employee does supply an answer ("I think five might do it"), it's a wisecrack that tells you have a deeper problem with him.

Laying this line on an underperformer will do nothing to solve the problem or even shine a light on it.

"I can't help you with that." You have employees. Employees are people and people have problems. Often workers will come to you to help them solve workplace woes or to help them navigate personal issues. Whatever they need to tell you, they came to you with full trust and confidence in your ability to offer at least some guidance. They're giving you a compliment on your ability to problem-solve, for crying out loud! Don't screw it up! Never use that line on any employee who taps you for advice or just needs you for a sounding board. This is where they'll recognize that there's a good person somewhere inside that good boss. With that, you're a two-time winner.

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