

Words, words, words

By MANAGING PEOPLE AT WORK on OCTOBER 7, 2014 6:56AM
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Being a supportive and encouraging manager is important to making your employees feel good about their roles, and ability to succeed in them.

But just as Taco Bell recently generated some negative public backlash for calling its employees "food champions," words of positivity must reflect the realities of your employee to serve as the motivational vehicle you intend. Here's a look how the words you use as a manager impact your team.

Say what?

Understanding the individual dispositions of your employees in regards to their roles is critical to using positive words in a way that resonates. To get a sense for each staffer's current level of engagement, Marcie Mueller, talent development practice leader at global career development firm IMPACT Group, suggests posing this telling question to each member of your team: *At work, are you given a chance to do what you do best everyday?*

She explains that in a recent Gallup poll, 30% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, and were six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs. Conversely, those who disagreed with it had zero engagement. When you understand each employee's current emotional connection (or lack thereof) to their job, you can assess the best way to verbalize support and feedback as a development tool.

For example, giving [team meetings](#) creative titles as a way to generate excitement around a task may be readily embraced by highly engaged employees, but considered silly and trite by disengaged employees.

Make your words fit their reality

Positive words are only as relevant as they are reflective of an employee's honest experience.

"At an abstract level, language partially creates our social realities; the terms and labels we use have the power to alter perceptions, behaviors and attitudes in the workplace," explains Dr. Zachary Schaefer, owner and founder of the consulting firm Mediation and Communication Solutions.

When employees have a high degree of autonomy and are empowered in their roles, titles like "customer champion" may be impactful, just as a sales team might be inspired by being told "you're kicking butt." But, there is a fine line between creating employee pride, commitment and loyalty, and appearing condescending with the language, says Schaefer.

Know words shape barriers

Naming teams can facilitate a sense of inclusion and invite all members to view one another's potential contribution to the task, at hand with an open mind despite their official "title," but it's important to ensure that such labels don't hinder team members' ability to grow, contribute to other projects or create cliques.

Mikal Robison, client service manager at the digital agency LEVEL Studios, shares an example of an agency he once worked for where a "Charlie's Angels" team name referring to three females who were hired at the same time, acted in parallel roles and reported to the same manager went awry.

"Another team was looking to mirror the organizational structure of this particular team and a senior leader referred the group as 'Bobby's Angels.' Despite the success and talent of the group, they were then challenged with a perception issue that their only purpose was to sit around and look good," says Robison.

Tell a story

In the book *The Nature of Leadership*, researchers share that leaders who tell great stories about their vision for the team, and communicate it in a way that encompasses the values of the entire team, succeed at inspiring followers. Instead of simply giving updates at weekly meetings, for example, invite your audience into the narrative; share real examples that teach the "lesson" of sorts, through storytelling. Paul Smith, author of *Lead with a Story: A Guide to Crafting Business Narratives that Captivate, Convince, and Inspire* suggests a great [leadership](#) story starts by providing brief context up front, using metaphors and analogies, using language that is tangible and concrete, adding the element of "surprise" when you can, and keeping the narrative to no more than three minutes.

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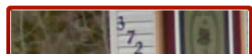
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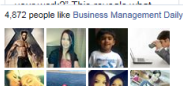
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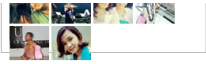
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14 Interview Questions That Get to the Heart of the Candidate
Interview questions need not be tricky. But they do need to reveal the character of what might be the next person on your payroll. Below is a list of questions you should consider asking your next job candidate, and what their answers might reveal:
1. "When were you excited about..."



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