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It is easy for many leaders of large organizations to say counterproductive things out of haste or emotion. And it is frustrating for the follower having to “figure it out.” Although some of the following phrases may work well within small organizations, many are not appropriate for larger environments. If you’re an organizational leader, avoid the following phrases:

“Make it happen now!” Quite often this statement leads to cutting corners and to the violation of personal or organizational integrity. Also, it can result in decisions that are not well-coordinated, thoughtful, or in accordance with established priorities.

“I don’t care how you get it done, just do it.” Much like the previous phrase, this is an invitation to your employees to take shortcuts, to be dishonest, or to act illegally. Many leaders learn the hard way that this can be an avenue to disaster.

“I don’t like surprises.” This phrase seems reasonably benign and useful. However, it often leads to many decisions being pushed up too high—an impediment to innovation and initiative on the part of associates.

“My door is always open.” In small organizations, this is probably okay. However, leaders of large organizations who use it frequently are misleading their associates. Because if your door really does remain open (that is, if you make yourself available at all times), then you probably will become buried in minutiae. And if you say your door is always open and it is not, you will soon

find that you have created an atmosphere of cynicism and skepticism about your availability.

“Be sure to keep me informed.” Here is a sure-fire way to ensure an overly full in-box and lots of phone calls, both day and night. This phrase is the antithesis of delegation and empowerment.

“Just give me the bottom line.” Bosses who use this phrase are often beginning to lose touch with the essential elements of important issues. Sometimes the result doesn’t reveal the total reality of the situation. You may be unaware of the obstacles that had to be hurdled, monkey wrenches that got thrown in, or how the team poured their hearts and souls into a project that didn’t end the way they hoped. Don’t quickly assume all is well or not well based on the result.

“We can’t handle any more this year.” This kind of guidance is counterproductive to higher levels of good planning, competence, and efficiency. If you refuse new approaches and ideas because of budgetary or other reasons, you may be making a major mistake. You should be actively engaging in divestiture work to unload activities that are no longer needed so you can develop, encourage, and implement new initiatives every year.

“If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” This commonly used phrase seems to make a great deal of sense. However, it is often an impediment to progress and an invitation to mediocrity. Innovation and initiative are helpful not only to faltering organizations, but also to ones that are running well. Perhaps the phrase should be: “If it’s not broken, it’s still worth

improving.”

“My mind is closed on that issue.” Your mind should never be totally closed on any issue because changing circumstances or new data may require readdressing the issue. Don’t be a rigid boss.

“I’ll call in every day for an update.” If you cannot go on a trip or holiday without checking in on a daily basis, you are making a very important statement about your approach to leadership; you are saying that you do not have confidence in the team and/or the system that you have set up. Let your people handle things in your absence and to know the threshold required to give you a call. It’s called trust and leadership development! If you properly trained and prepared them, they’ll be fine.

“This organization was in bad shape until 18 [12, 24, ...] months ago.” If it was 18 months ago that you took charge, then you revealed a great deal about yourself, your ego, and your objectivity. Your message is that the previous boss must have been a lousy leader—that the staff and subordinate leaders are not capable of excellent performance unless they are blessed with you as their boss—and that if you should leave for another job, retire, or die, the place will probably fall apart. Don’t boast about how great YOU are!

Lastly, don’t say anything that comes across as racist or sexist or joke about cultures or ethnicities. There’s no place for any of that in today’s workforce. Be the kind of leader who carefully thinks before speaking and acts in a dignified manner toward everyone.

~ The End ~