



What leaders say that makes a difference

I'm fortunate to work in an organization that not only explores what leadership means in many contexts — as evidenced by this issue of *JSD* and other publications — but also nurtures leadership qualities among its staff and members. I've observed that the words leaders use are essential to how they develop themselves and others as leaders. The right words at the right times open doors and contribute to growth-oriented cultures.

I've seen that when effective leaders talk, they use these words and phrases.

YES. Professionals developing their leadership qualities say yes to requests from those who ask them for help. They know it is wise to show they are willing to pitch in where they are needed. They also say yes to challenges that are daunting, that they might not be quite ready for. Only through saying yes in the face of such risks do they give themselves permission to stretch and grow. Offering new leaders the chance to yes to stretch goals is a key responsibility for those in charge.

NO. No can be difficult for leaders to say, particularly aspiring leaders. No is just as important as yes. Saying no shows that you have a guiding vision as a leader and you know what will serve

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that vision and what won't. Saying no demonstrates that you place your highest priorities first and won't let distractions rule the day.

I NEED HELP. Leaders sometimes hesitate to admit they can't tackle everything they've undertaken. Yet in order to be successful, effective leaders turn to their teams for support all the time. Fortunately, calling on others multiplies their opportunities for growth as well. Leaders may also think twice about saying I don't know unless they have their continuous learner mindset in gear.

WHAT DO OTHERS THINK ABOUT THIS? Inviting colleagues to contribute their points of view both nurtures their leadership development and shows that you value a range of perspectives during a discussion or decision-making process. Providing opportunities to practice speaking up in safe environments is critical to helping others develop their leader voice.

HERE'S WHAT I THINK ABOUT THIS. Effective leaders have a point of view, and they share it with their colleagues. They model speaking up and articulating a perspective such that others can make meaning of it. They also model hearing input around an idea when the time is right for conversation, and stating clearly if they're making a decision when that is the case.



I'M SORRY. Successful leaders admit their mistakes. They don't make excuses. They help others understand how they will fix their errors. They also share what they've learned from their mistakes; breakdowns are a prime learning opportunity and leaders take advantage of every opportunity to improve.

LET'S CELEBRATE. Leaders eager to nurture others on their learning journeys acknowledge accomplishments publicly and share credit for notable achievements. They look for opportunities to celebrate leadership in every corner of the organization, and they encourage others to do the same. Amplifying leadership actions contributes to a growth-oriented culture.

What else do effective leaders say when they communicate with their colleagues? What has worked for you? I know that I need to say "let's celebrate" more often — there are so many accomplishments worth shouting about. I also know that my yes/no balance always needs work. What do you wish you said more often? ■