

6 things to never say at work

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Don't tarnish your reputation by making whiny, haughty or untrue statements. Remember, silence can be golden — especially if it prevents you from uttering one of these potentially career-damaging phrases:

1. "I can't take on any more work. I'm completely overwhelmed already."

Run your fingers through your hair and let out a big sigh during this lament and colleagues will either nominate you for an Academy Award or provide the number of a good therapist. Professionals work on solving problems, not creating drama.

"Yes, the recession and corporate downsizing has meant fewer people doing more work; however, employers want employees who can manage their workloads and communicate when they have reached their maximum capacity," says Lisa Quast, CEO of Seattle-based Career Woman Inc. and author of "Your Career, Your Way!" "A much better comment is, 'Let's look at my project list and see where we can work this in. It might mean moving something else out to a later date.'"

2. "Joe is an idiot."

Yes, maybe he is — and he may be your boss someday. Don't say something you'll later regret. Even if he doesn't find out, bad-mouthing a co-worker can make listeners wonder what you say about them when they aren't around.

"Never throw your colleagues under the bus or talk about them behind their back," says career coach Roy Cohen, author of "The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide." "Colleagues who trust and admire you will be your best support system to promote your reputation as desirable and valuable. When they don't feel that you are transparent in your intentions, your disruptive actions will raise doubts about your ability to be both a team player and a team motivator. Both are essential assets for effective leadership."

3. "That's not fair!"

Brad Karsh, president of Chicago-based JB Training Solutions and co-author of the upcoming book "Manager 3.0: A Millennial's Guide to Rewriting the Rules of Management," notes that this statement is frequently uttered by younger workers. "It may sound harsh, but in the working world, fair does not always mean equal. It can be difficult to understand that at work it's not always fair up and down, but it's also not fair across. For example, a company may hire 100 entry-level employees on the same day. Are they all going to get promoted or receive raises on the same day? No. They may work different hours a week, at different locations and for different types of people. It will never be fair in your career, so get over it."

3. "That's not how we did it at my old company."

Make such a comment and colleagues may wonder why you ever left the other employer. As Quast notes, "No one likes an arrogant know-it-all who thinks they're better than others or who believes their previous company did things better." Skip the comparisons and focus instead on articulating your ideas clearly and respectfully.

3. "I'll have it on your desk by 3 p.m." (when you know you won't)

Your boss and colleagues have deadlines, too. When you fail to deliver, it affects others. On those rare occasions when you can't fulfill a promise, have the decency to give a heads-up. Deadlines may be changeable or perhaps other workers can shift focus to help out.

"(Don't) tell people — whether they are colleagues, vendors, clients and customers or management — what you think they want to hear instead of the truth," Cohen says. "For example, if you knowingly provide a client with incorrect information about a delivery date and you fail to honor that deadline, you risk tarnishing both your credibility and the reputation of your company. The potential impact may be enormous as customers abandon you for a more reliable provider."

6. "I'm bored."

Nothing good ever comes from this statement. Overworked colleague Mary will want to slug you, cubicle neighbor Jeff will think you're a slacker, and your boss will question why he's bothering to give you a paycheck this week.

"There's always something you could be doing," Karsh says. "Take the initiative to tackle new projects; don't wait to be asked to do something. Be innovative and find new projects to work on to make your boss's life easier. Figure out what is keeping your boss up at night, and solve that problem."

