

How To Be a Success at Everything

Fast Company | Ophira Edut | August 27, 2024



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These 3 phrases are a recipe for being misunderstood. Here's what to say instead.

Knowing the basic types of coworker can help your innocent words not be subject to great misinterpretation if you attack their values.

George Bernard Shaw famously said, "The single biggest illusion about communication is that it has taken place." Yet communication based in curiosity about each other can infuse life back into the workplace.

"When you build a culture of curiosity, people feel seen and heard—like they truly matter," says Scott Shigeoka, author of *Seek: How Curiosity Can Transform Your Life and Change the World*. "This kind of positive organizational culture does wonders for employees' well-being, hiring top talent, retention rates, and productivity and fulfillment at work."

Unfortunately, the line between natural curiosity and a one-way ticket to cancellation is more perilous than ever. How can we foster curiosity without treading into taboo or overstepping cross-cultural boundaries?

The way we see it, there are three distinct "types" of people (we call it I*AM) motivated by a different value or principle. We've arrived at a framework for these types based on years of study, hundreds of client workshops for executive teams at companies like Nike, Saks Fifth

Avenue, Hearst, and Klaviyo, and a healthy skepticism for quizzes with 70 questions that might reveal you're an Enneagram 4 or an INTJ. We don't claim this to be scientific, but based on an ancient technology that has guided people for millennia.

Innovators are often driven by pride. They are the visionaries, pioneers, and trailblazers who invent new paradigms from their imagination and bring them into being. Often their ideas may sound farfetched, drawing blank stares when first presented. Ten years later, these "crazy" concepts are part of the zeitgeist.

Authorities are motivated by integrity. The builders, sustainers, and experts, Authorities succeed by carefully building a path to mastery. They will ensure that every "i" is dotted and every "t" crossed before proceeding to the next step. Through this linear process, they achieve sustainable success and security, one of their dominant drivers.

Mavens are motivated by playful connection. No person is an island—unless, that is, the party boat drops off a motley crew of lively souls at Maven Cay. The communal Maven is all about connecting people and gathering to discuss, critique, and above all, experience. Most likely to be makers, creators, and unreformable tinkerers, the Maven wants to wear every hat, preferably all at once!

Knowing some of these basic characteristics for their I*AM type can help your innocent words not be subject to great misinterpretation if you attack their values.

Here are some of the top phrases to avoid.

2 words to never say to an Innovator

If you're a trailblazing Innovator—or you know someone high on the Innovator scale—you've probably encountered how headstrong this type can get.

When Innovators are seized by inspiration, they absolutely have to scratch the itch. Even if they fail spectacularly. Even if it leads them to the precipice of financial peril. Innovators are the embodiment of potential energy turning kinetic. To them, the possibility IS the prize.

So what are two words that you should never utter to an Innovator—unless you want to set them on an epic quest to prove you wrong?

"You can't."

Not only are those words infuriating to the Innovator but they're also irrelevant.

You see, Innovators live in the future. They're natural inventors and ideators.

Your approval and skepticism are based on the past, and your lack of imagination is your problem, not theirs.

Innovators are used to disrupting the status quo and changing things up. It's literally their nature. Innovator cardinal "modality" (in astro-speak) is competitive, pioneering, and self-authorized. So go ahead and criticize. They'll only double down on their efforts.

What you can say to an Innovator instead

"Tell me more . . . "

The Innovator is happy to hear your input, as long as it's not dismissive. Since they're in ideation mode, Innovators appreciate thoughtful questions. Prompt an Innovator to "say more about that" with a neutral, curious tone and you might be surprised by how well thought-out their vision actually is. Before you know it, you might even be swept up in the excitement, partnering on their Next Big Thing.

"How do you envision this unfolding?"

Innovators are what we call time travelers. They hop between the past, present, and future, mixing metaphors and throwing a bunch of seemingly random ingredients into the pot. As a result, the early expressions of their ideas can leave people confused, cross-eyed, and concerned, trying to grasp what they mean and worrying if they're going to drive the whole crew over a cliff. Is this some harebrained scheme or a genius idea? A little of both? The only way to find out is to ask the H-word: HOW?

Sometimes the Innovator has a whole map—other times, it's a partial one. Authorities are especially helpful as sounding boards and simplifiers when a plan is needed, provided they don't shoot the idea down.

"Am I hearing what you're saying correctly?"

Mirroring what you think you heard back to the Innovator and asking clarifying questions can get you both on the same page. It's not quite as intense as a How Conversation, but it will help you quickly assess if the Innovator's idea is ready for prime time, and diagnose where there may be some holes in the plan you could help them fill.

2 words to never say to an Authority

Impeccable Authorities are the inspectors. They take pride in their thorough audits and won't rest until they discover the ultimate solutions. Where others cut corners, they have the staying power to make sure the job is done right.

So if your Authority is fretting or raising concerns about anything, here are two words never to say to them:

"It's fine."

Keep your California chill on ice, because it's actually NOT fine—at least, not until the Authority says it is. Plus, you're stealing the Authority's lines! They'll be the ones to tell you when it's fine after they've thoroughly examined the problem from every angle.

Can this make you bristle at times and feel like the Authority is trying to control the whole process? Certainly. By saying “It’s fine” you probably mean “Your uptightness is killing my vibe” or “Relax, the world won’t end if you make a mistake.”

Trouble is, as soon as you utter any version of this to the Authority, you’ll polarize into a parent-child dynamic. Better to leave the Authority on their flaw-finding mission than try to stop them in their tracks. Plus, this type has a superior ability to stay cool in conflict, which will guarantee that even if you get your way in an argument, they will emerge looking like the adult in the room and you the petulant, misbehaving child.

What you can say to an Authority instead

“You know best!” Whether that platitude is true or not, the Authority wants to know that you appreciate their efforts to protect everyone from harm. After all, that’s why they’re being so fastidious about every detail. The Authority aims to please. When they know you have confidence in them, they work overtime to impress you and make you happy. Why would you want to interfere with that?

“Is there a process you’d like me to follow?”

It’s hard reading between the lines of an agitated Authority’s clenched consternation. They may not be speaking—or if they do, it’s clipped and officious. Instead of taking it personally, understand that the Authority likes to do things in a certain order. That’s their superpower! So if you try to do Step J before Step B, it can throw their whole system off. Good thing is, the Authority usually has an efficient path to reach the finish line. And if you let them show you the whole map first, they’ll patiently hear your suggestions afterward.

“We’ve all been working hard. Let’s do something fun later.”

Work and play are two separate categories for the Authority, and they prefer the twain don’t meet. But when you sense your Authority is getting way too serious, suggesting an activity after the work is done is the perfect antidote. The off-duty Authority can be a wildly decadent shopper, eater, and partier. Just don’t ask them to do that during office hours, okay?

2 words to never say to a Maven

Playful Mavens are the Peter Pans. With their hyperbole, hobbies, and hyperactive temperaments, they’re the kids who never sit still in class. Mavens are funny. They’re fascinating. Ironic. Iconic.

They can also be too much of a good thing.

Maven energy is often best consumed in portions, instead of served buffet-style. The Maven that doesn’t come with a mute, pause or off button can become a disruptive force. They may even be immune to your scolding and eye rolls—and your exasperation after futile attempts to reform them.

But there are two words you’ll live to regret saying to a Maven all the same, and here they are:

“Grow up.”

So why is this such a no-no?

Because play is an underrated superpower—and it’s the one that belongs to Mavens.

Mavens know you might take their gift of gab for granted. You could even find them a little over-eager, like that Golden Retriever who always jumps on you or drops the drooly tennis ball in your lap—or just “extra” with their #OOTDs and Spotify playlists and bottomless text messages.

But go on a Maven detox for a week and circle back to us.

Suddenly, your life is quieter. But it’s also kind of, well, boring.

When you want to take a spontaneous trip to Rio, go see Taylor Swift in Tokyo, or have cheeseburgers at 4:00 a.m. . . . who’s gonna be your ride-or-die? The Authority is in bed by 10:00 p.m. The Innovator’s already booked until August. But the Maven? That’s the I*AM type who will drop everything and join the party.

At the end of the day, Mavens know that your life would be way less fun without them. So dress up for their annual Christmas card (and yes, this year’s them is the “Winter at the Westminster Dog Show” . . . is that a problem for you?) Sign up for their Burning Man theme camp or TED talk workshop.

What you can say to a Maven instead

“Sounds like fun—what’s the itinerary?”

Since Mavens lead with hype, you could (mistakenly) assume they skipped the practical parts, like budget and schedule, in their excitement. You may be pleasantly surprised to find that the Maven actually has an intricate, color-coded plan, especially if the mutable planets in their astrological charts are in Gemini or Virgo. If you’re the type who likes to know the agenda, this is an empowering way to ask your Maven for details without insulting or offending them.

“What options are you currently considering?”

Since Mavens live in the present tense, it’s best to ask questions that can be answered with the phrase “right now” or today.” Anything framed in the past tense can set them on edge, making them feel shamed, scolded, or judged. Rebellion and mutiny may follow. Avoid phrases like “You should try . . . ” (future tense) or “Have you done . . . ?” (past tense), or worse, “When are you finally going to . . . ?” The Maven is a Mirror, and often just needs a neutral sounding board to help them talk through their options aloud.

“When are you thinking about doing this?”

We admit: This can be challenging. You’re now deadlining the Maven, and there’s a good chance they feel overwhelmed or stuck. But if it’s clear the Maven’s been avoiding their

responsibilities—and it's starting to impact you—it has to be addressed. Be warned, the Maven may attempt a turnaround, using their gift with words to gaslight you into getting off their backs. What they really need is partnership. At this point, you might help the Maven break up the daunting task into small pieces. Prepare to roll up your sleeves and do the hard work alongside them. The good news? Once you get momentum going, the Maven can take it from there.

I recently asked one of my private clients, a male CFO at a thriving hedge fund, if he thought his use of this framework would ding his credibility in the corporate world. His answer surprised me.

"It's not actually strange to me at all," he replied. "So many of us are doing psychedelics. We have coaches who are showing us how to meditate and get in touch with our feelings. And we're working with these tech people who explain that spirituality is a way to access another part of our minds, and get an advantage."