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MONDAY MORNING MANAGER

Harvey Schachter's guide on how to handle everything from overflowing e-mail to meeting overload

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YES NO PLEASE SORRY THE POWER NO THANKS THANKS HELP PLEASE OF WORDS STOP NO YES STOP SORRY THANKS

Leaders recognize them. And consultant Patrick O'Neill says in his Extraordinary Conversations newsletter that seven words, applied with integrity and precision, can transform your relationships

YES

Yes sends a clear message, confirming agreement with someone else's point of view. When we say yes, we are often accepting a request to do something (or refrain from doing something), and accepting responsibility for a certain action. "Yes is not perhaps. When we muddle the two words we make a mess," Mr. O'Neill writes. "Perhaps is an expression of uncertainty. It is a valid response when there is a requirement for further thought, negotiation, or where we may lack the authority for agreement."

NO

This is tougher to say, and if you don't then you may agree to things you are half-hearted about. Being overwhelmed at work may result from an inability to say no or to negotiate better time frames. "Sometimes avoiding no and going with the flow is the worst thing you can do. It can damage relationships as quickly as a misstated yes," he says.

PLEASE

Our workplaces are less hierarchical and less command-and-control than in the past. You won't succeed by barking orders, as if in the military. If you want employee commitment, you must treat others with respect and master the word please.

THANKS

This recognizes the actions of others who have helped you. It should be commonplace at work but Mr. O'Neill has spent hundreds of hours in many organizations over the years listening to employees complain about the absence of this word at work and trying to rectify the damage caused by its absence. "In my experience, a little more time spent by leaders saying thanks to their people and giving credit where credit is due, goes a long way to improving morale," he writes. "An honest, heartfelt thanks is one of the most empowering experiences you can have. This is especially true when the person delivering the appreciation is an authority figure, or is a figure of respect."

HELP

When we need assistance, this is the word to use, but often we choke it back, spending hours or days in quiet desperation trying to figure something out or trying to cope with too much work. "Maybe we think it betrays weakness, incompetence, or we're too proud to ask? But the request for assistance advances action. Refusal to ask for help always creates a bottleneck," he notes.

STOP

We are all operating on hyper-speed these days, but sometimes a leader must recognize it's time to put on the brakes rather than risk the fallout from reckless driving. "It is the appropriate word when people are running around like chickens with their heads cut off, are confused about what to do, or are on a collision course with each other. Activity that is manic is a sign of panic," he says. Stop can also signal that limits or boundaries have been crossed.

SORRY

We all make mistakes – even male leaders, Mr. O'Neill notes. When people have been hurt, you should express regret and repair the relationship.



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