

10 Things You Should Not Say to Your Boss

Telling off your boss is a temptation impossible to resist. But letting your guard down can have disastrous consequences. Here's a list of phrases most bosses hate to hear



by Sunanda Poduwal

When you are interacting with the boss, the most trivial thinking-aloud moment can turn into a nightmare – who knows how your words would be interpreted. So it is absolutely necessary to ensure that your foot doesn't find a place in your mouth at the workplace, especially around the people you report to. Agreed, telling off your boss is a common fantasy and a temptation almost impossible to resist. But bear in mind, letting your guard down and telling the power-that-be exactly what you feel can have disastrous consequences.

It could be just an innocuous statement, but you may come across as lazy, careless and/or disrespectful to your boss. So, if there isn't a mental filter in place, or if the existing one has proved to be ineffective, here's a list of phrases that most employers would hate to hear. Make no mistake, this list is not exhaustive and is in no-particular order.

That's Not in My Job Description

Nowadays, companies hire those who can wear many hats. So, if a particular task doesn't come technically under your job description, try not complaining about it – unless it's completely off the track. "If your boss thinks you are unwilling or incapable of doing what you've been asked, you will be considered a weak player," says Vinay Grover, CEO of Symbiosis Management Consultants, a headhunting firm.

I Can't Do This Task

You maybe nose-deep in work but an instant refusal gives an impression that you just don't want to carry out a particular task. "You should always give valid reasons first and then say no," says Sunil Goel, director, GlobalHunt, an executive search firm. If you happen to be one of those who find it difficult to say no, don't fall into the trap of saying an instant yes, only to go back on your word later.

I Just Never Got Around To It

It's quite simple: if your boss has entrusted you with something, you've just got to do it. "I was given an interesting assignment to work on while I was on something else. Call it poor time-management, I was unable to work on the project. When my manager inquired, I decided to be honest," says Nishit Mishra, a marketing executive with a multinational banking giant. Mishra had to hand over the assignment to a colleague; never a pleasant thing to do, and you'd agree.

I Don't Know How To Do It

You may actually be clueless but you need not say it in as many words. Saying "I don't know" shows a weakness and it also may be interpreted as an excuse that you just don't want to do it. "Tell your boss that you are prepared to do the task but that you may require assistance or guidance because you haven't done it before," says Grover of Symbiosis.

I Am Overqualified For This

The task at hand might appear 'lowly'. However, you are at work and instead of playing a big shot, you should just roll up your sleeves and get to work. "This is what your boss expects of you and anything less will show that you are actually not qualified to get things done," says Ronesh Puri, managing director, Executive Access, a headhunting firm. Do it yourself or delegate it to someone else – come what may, but get it done!

Sorry, I Missed That Point

You might be nursing a hangover or missing your caffeine shot while sitting in a painful early morning meeting. No matter what, be clued in to what is being discussed. Don't dream of the sundae you plan to have post-lunch when the boss is talking to you. "This phrase can do more harm than good. If you are coming up with such excuses then it leaves an impression that you are not attentive and are losing interest in your work," says Goel of GlobalHunt.

I Need to Talk to You, it's important

Two simple rules that will justify the presence of this statement in this list. **Rule#1:** Your time is only half as precious (or even lesser) as your boss'. **Rule#2:** What is important to you might not be all that important to your boss. Consider both of these unsaid rules and you will end up making some qualitative

changes like saying "slightly urgent" or "somewhat important".

I Will Try

Your bosses don't want you to try doing a task, they want you to do it. Trying is not an option here. Saying "I will try" will tell your boss that they cannot depend on you. It will not give them the assurance that the task will be taken care of. You wouldn't want to hear what management trainee Swati Pillai was told when she muttered the unacceptable. "The company pays you for doing not trying." Ouch!

Don't Blame Me – It's Not My Fault

In the face of criticism or a reprimand, your defense mechanism will inevitably kick in. However, avoid dodging the responsibility or blaming someone else. Of course, you would want to clear the air, but there's a time, place and way to do it. Don't defend when the boss's voice is at a higher-than-comfortable pitch.

Why Do I Need To Do This? This is Stupid!

You maybe on back-slapping terms with your boss, but at the end of the day, he's the senior. Anything that questions his authority and judgment is to be avoided at all costs. "If your bosses have asked you to do it, they must think it is important enough. By saying this you openly challenge their competency as a boss," warns Grover. ■