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## 11 sentences your boss doesn't want to hear



You want to have an open, honest relationship with your boss.

But that doesn't mean you can just say anything to them in the workplace.

There are exceptions to every rule, but for the most part, you're probably better off avoiding potentially alienating your manager.

Business Insider reached out to managers and career experts to find out which sentences they just don't want to hear from their employees.

Here are 11 phrases you might want to avoid:



**Don't alienate your manager.** wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock

### 1. 'Let's hold off on making that decision'

"As a startup CEO, timely decision making is critical, and I don't want to put off until tomorrow what we can do today," says Frida Polli, CEO of applicant screening service [pymetrics](#). "Gather all the information you can, and make the best decision you can given the data. Decision making with imperfect information or under conditions of ambiguity is a critical skill to develop for all

employees. This is different than rash decision making, where no information is considered and decisions are made from a hunch."

## 2. 'Okay ...'

Career site [Create & Cultivate](#) founder Jaclyne Johnson says that it's important to be clear — especially when you're communicating with your boss online or over text. Short, curt responses can sometimes be too ambiguous.

"There is really no time for passive-aggressive bumps in the road and, in terms of communication, everyone needs to be on the same page," Johnson says. "We do a lot over text messages and the ellipsis is just hard to decipher. Are we good to go? Are there questions? I think being straightforward is the best way to push through the noise."

## 3. 'It's not my fault'

"The blame game never works in the workplace. Odds are, if something bad happens, it's not one person's fault," says Andy Bailey, CEO of business coaching firm [Petra Coach](#). "Take responsibility for finding a solution rather than casting blame elsewhere — especially if you're in any kind of management position."

Joe Staples, the CMO of project management software [Workfront](#), says that good bosses won't prioritize finding someone to blame.

"Fault-finding is a time-waster and fills the conversation with excuses," Staples says. "I want to know how it happened so it can be avoided in the future, and what the plan is to fix it."

CEO of online camera retailer [MPB.com](#) Matt Barker says he also prefers for employees to try to fix, rather than dodge, problems. "It's important in any job to always try and think beyond the obvious and be a creative problem solver," he says.

## 4. 'I have a problem'

"I hate to hear the phrase 'I have a problem,' when there is not a proposed solution," says Bryan Miles, co-CEO of virtual assistant and bookkeeping site [BELAY](#). "This is particularly annoying because it feels as if whoever is saying it is waiting on me to solve the issue, instead of finding ways to resolve it themselves. I like team members and leaders that bring you problems with potential solutions because it shows they've been proactive about the issue."

[Weebly](#) CFO Kim Jabal says that it's better to say something along the lines of: "We have a huge opportunity to fix something that has gone wrong. Here are a few ideas. I'd love your input."

"I love employees who have a passion for tackling problems versus avoiding them," Jabal says. "I want to be surrounded by employees who want to take the steeper hill because they know there will be a big sense of accomplishment at the top as opposed to those that prefer to coast on the easy road."

"Problems happen and while it's great to be able to spot them and get to the root cause, you need to be the problem solver as well," says Marcy Axelrad, global senior director of talent management at online retailer [Wayfair](#).

So, all in all, if you've got bad news for your boss, you'd better have some potential solutions as well. It's not about sugarcoating issues, it's about demonstrating that you're on the ball.

"Bosses prefer asset-based problem solvers, not deficit-based problem bringers, so the next time a problem arises and you need to bring it to your boss' attention, make sure you don't just hand over the problem," Heide Abelli, vice president of business skills and leadership at cloud-based learning site [Skillsoft](#). "Instead, come prepared with the information and recommendation your boss needs in order to help address the problem... If you have tried your best and you just can't come up with any potential solutions, then be honest and tell your boss that you would like to work with him or her to brainstorm potential solutions. That way you show you're not simply handing over a problem, but want to be involved in solving it."

## 5. 'If my opinion matters ...'

"When someone starts off a suggestion or idea with that phrase, it automatically undermines whatever it is they are going to say next," says Shannon Miles, co-CEO of [BELAY](#). "Instead, show confidence when bringing an idea to the table."

## 6. 'My gut tells me ...'

If you're working in a data-driven field or company, there are times where your gut feeling just isn't going to cut it.

"The facts and the numbers inform our decisions," says Hari Ravichandran, CEO of web-hosting company [Endurance International Group](#). "While qualitative plays an important part in how we behave the quantitative is a vital factor in what we decide. You need to be prepared to have data to back-up your assertions, even if they are instinctual."

## 7. 'I don't know'

"If I ask you a question that you don't know the answer to, that's okay. Nobody knows everything," says Jodi Glickman, the CEO of leadership development and communication training firm [Great on the Job](#). "The key is not to sound like you don't know anything. 'I don't know' is lame, it's not helpful, and it doesn't make you look good."

If you're caught off-guard by your boss's question, Glickman recommends saying something more along the lines of: "Here's what I know, here's what I don't know, here's how I'll figure it out."

"Hearing this from an employee shows that they did not even try to find the answer and does not know what's going on with something under their responsibility," says CEO of booking platform [TripActions](#) Ariel Cohen. "As your boss, we want to hear that you're prepared. Even further, if a question is posed that you haven't thought about remind me that you can think on your feet and leverage your experience on the fly."

## 8. 'I don't have time'

This is a terrible way to respond when your manager asks you to take on a new task — even if it's true.

"Prioritization is important," Axelrad says. "Be flexible and open to the need to pivot. If you can't fit a project into your schedule, then let the person requesting your time know that while you have some critical work to get done right now, but you can get to this project on X date. Always ask if this proposed timeline will work. If not, talk to your manager about shifting priorities to accommodate requests."

David Dourgarian, CEO of staffing software company [TempWorks Software](#), says that it's important to make time when it comes to getting crucial tasks done.

"Going above and beyond sometimes means coming in early or staying past 5 p.m. to assist a client with a problem no matter how small — and that applies to everyone from the top down," he says. "We look for employees that understand the importance of client loyalty and bring a good attitude about putting in the extra effort to ensure the company continues to uphold that mission."

## 9. 'I'll try to get that done by Friday'

"Don't try," Bailey says. "Actually do it. In the words of Yoda, 'There is no try, only do.' If you can't get something done, tell your boss, so you can work together to get it done — or bring in help where it's needed."

## 10. 'I missed the deadline'

"Stuff happens," Staples says. "People miss deadlines. Just don't tell me after the fact. Give me as much advanced notice as possible that you're going to miss it."

## 11. 'What is my career path?'

Don't rely on your boss to figure out your future for you.

"Employees should come to their managers with a sense of their goals, asking instead for help or support on how they achieve them," says Dan Sommer, CEO of continuing education program manager [Trilogy Education](#). "When you're asking what is my career path, you are demonstrating that you haven't done your research or put in the time to really think through where you want to get to."

He recommends asking "How do I get there?" instead.