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MANAGEMENT &amp; LEADERSHIP

## Why 'plain speak' matters in the pursuit of success

How effective is the way you communicate? What role does language play in enabling people to achieve clarity and successful outcomes?



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Most of us are taught to be polite, and that's a good thing. Many of us are also taught that a sophisticated vocabulary, or 'big words' help us to appear intelligent and educated. The problem is, however, that when we hold back from speaking the full extent of the truth, or use language that is difficult to understand, barriers to success are created.

### Four essential reasons plain speak matters as much as it does to enabling success include these:

#### 1. Trust:

Reflect for a moment on how much more likely you are to trust and follow a leader whose agenda you understand. In my experience, most people trust the type of leader who is willing to tell them how things really are. Of course, the way the message is delivered matters just as much, but when leaders are honest, clear and respectful, great standards of performance become possible.

#### 2. Clarity:

Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you had no idea what someone was talking about despite your familiarity with, or even expertise in, the topic? I have - and it was perplexing. Invited to participate in a joint pitch for work, I sat bemused as I listened to my colleague use every complex word imaginable to describe what we could do to help this particular organisation. The client seemed confused and, unsurprisingly, we didn't win the job.

Every profession, industry, and indeed every business is likely to have its own language. Recognise when acronyms or jargon create barriers to understanding or engagement. Recognise also when polite conversation or playing it safe is undermining clarity.

### **3. Growth:**

Tip-toeing around reality and diluting the truth in your message is problematic when it comes to resolving issues or helping people to learn and grow. The willingness and ability to say how things really are, with respect and sensitivity, is essential to creating the depth of insight people need to be at their best.

Contemplate for a moment when you have been given feedback that allowed you to more clearly see how you could be better. Being a great coach or mentor takes the ability and courage to help people to look into the mirror and see how they can improve. Tough love takes an approach that is frank and kind, direct and compassionate.

### **4. Engagement:**

Reflect on when you have observed a leader deliver a message that seemed contrived or insincere. How did that leave you feeling about them and the credibility of their message? Did it inspire you to buy in or were you left wondering what the real story is?

Australians have especially well-developed 'BS' detectors. Typically, we don't respond well to hype and marketing pitches from our leaders. Telling people, for example, that all is well in your world when clearly the pressure is on and everyone can see the wolf at the door, is unhelpful. Keeping your team engaged, especially through tough times, takes honest communication about the realities of your circumstances and the reasons you believe the team can succeed.