8 Overused Words That Make You Sound Unprofessional

By Peter Economy

Ever wonder which words give off the least professional vibe at work? Often, they're usually the ones you use the most - and the ones you don't even think twice about using. Here are eight overused words that can make you sound unprofessional to others. When you know what these words are, you can avoid saying them in the future - and use more of the words that make you look more professional.

1. Just

When you put the word "just" in front of anything, you mean to qualify it to downplay its importance. Unfortunately, however, this also downplays the effect that you may be hoping to have on whomever you're speaking to. Minimizing your problems gives you less credit than you deserve and makes you seem less professional.

2. Actually

Using "actually" in a phrase - especially right at the beginning or tagged on at the end - makes it seem as if you're correcting someone when you're really not. When speaking to your boss, watch out for how many times the word accidentally slips out of your mouth. It may surprise you.

3. Sorry

There's nothing worse than someone who over-apologizes for themselves - well, other than someone who never apologies, that is. If you're saying sorry an inordinate amount of times a day, you may want to reevaluate what exactly you are apologizing for.

4. Can't

Although this word doesn't appear to be unprofessional at first glance, it turns out it truly carries a sense of laziness. We associate the word "can't" with not being able to due to a lack of trying - not because we don't know how, or some other fault. Next time, instead of diving straight to can't, try to figure out a way that you can.

5. (That) Sucks

In whichever context you're using it, there's no way "sucks" fits in anywhere at a functioning workplace - especially not in relation to your own sentiments toward anything at the office.

6. You

When speaking to someone about his or her proper role in the work you're doing, be careful with how much you use the pronoun "you." It can feel overly aggressive, as if you're trying to push the blame off yourself onto someone else.

7. I

It may seem a bit counterintuitive to do away with both "I" and "You," but there is a method behind the madness. Overusing "I" can make you seem selfish and as if you only ever look out for your own self-interests rather than those of the team.

8. Any Curse Word

They're not made for the office. Try to hold off as best as you can until you head out the door to go home.

While Peter Economy has spent the better part of two decades of his life slugging it out mano a mano in the management trenches, he is also the best-selling author of *Managing for Dummies*, *The Management Bible, Leading Through Uncertainty*, and more than 75 other books, with total sales in excess of two million copies. He has also served as associate editor for *Leader to Leader* for more than 10 years, where he has worked on projects with the likes of Jim Collins, Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and many other top management and leadership thinkers. Sign up here to always stay up to date with Peter's latest Inc.com columns, and visit him anytime at petereconomy.com.
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