The Words We Choose: Language That Builds Better Teams

The way we communicate – especially in fast-moving teams – shapes how people show up, share ideas, and solve problems. Even small word choices can set the tone for openness, trust, and collaboration.

Here are some everyday swaps that can shift your team culture for the better.

1. Say: "Input" instead of "Feedback"

Asking for "input" instead of "feedback" makes the request feel more collaborative. It invites ideas, not just evaluation or critique.

2. "Let's co-create" instead of "I need this from you"

This small change fosters partnership. It shows others they're part of the process – not just accountable for tasks. It also breaks down silos and encourages shared ownership and creativity.

3. "Here's a working draft" instead of "Final version"

Calling something a "working draft" keeps the door open for input. It signals the project is still evolving and encourages early, ongoing contributions – unlike labeling it "final," which can shut down discussion.

4. "Curious to hear your thoughts" vs. "Do you agree?"

Open-ended language makes space for honesty. "Do you agree?" can lead to surface-level nodding. But when you frame your question with curiosity, it invites perspective and deepens the discussion.

5. Say: "What's working well?" as often as "What could be better?"

Too often, we focus on problems to solve. By also asking what's going well, we reinforce what to keep doing – and we help build psychological safety through recognition, not just critique.

6. Say: "Let's pressure-test it" instead of "Let's find what's wrong"

Framing review as a way to strengthen ideas – not criticize them – can shift the energy of a conversation. It's about building resilience in a project, not assigning blame.

7. Say: "What's clear and what's still unclear?" instead of "Any questions?"

"Any questions?" often leads to silence, even if people are confused. This alternative framing normalizes uncertainty and makes it easier for team members to speak up without fear of looking uninformed.

8. Say: "Let's revisit this together" instead of "You missed the mark"

When something doesn't land, how you talk about it matters. Collaborative language fosters growth and trust, while blame-based phrasing can shut people down.

Words are powerful.

They shape how we collaborate, how we lead, and how safe people feel showing up fully.

Pay attention to what shifts in tone, engagement, or collaboration and invite your team to experiment with the language too.

Want another set of eyes on your messaging?
Reach out, I'd be glad to chat.