

Say It Better at Work: A Communication Cheat Sheet

Use this handy reference to communicate difficult thoughts with clarity and professionalism, whether you're setting boundaries, navigating conflict, or simply trying to sound more tactful in your emails and messages.

Blunt vs. Professional Phrases

Blunt phrase	Professional phrase
That's not my job.	Let's align on ownership to ensure everything's covered without duplication.
You're not my boss.	I'd love to clarify who's leading this initiative so we stay aligned.
I quit.	After careful thought, I've decided to move on to new opportunities.
No.	Thanks for thinking of me! Unfortunately, I can't take this on right now.
I don't want to work with them.	Can we explore a different team structure that plays to everyone's strengths?
This isn't worth the money.	Given the scope, I'd love to revisit the compensation for this task.
That's your problem, not mine.	Let's align on how I can support this without overextending my current role.
Stay in your lane.	Let's stay focused on our respective deliverables for efficiency.
I don't have time for this.	Can we revisit the timeline so I can give this the attention it deserves?
Sorry for your loss.	I'm so sorry to hear this. Please take all the time you need and let me know how I can support you.

Bonus Phrases by Scenario

Blunt version	Rewrite	Use case
I need help.	I've hit a roadblock in resolving [issue]. Could I get your input on the best way to proceed?	Collaboration
We need to talk.	Could we have a 10-minute meeting to discuss how best we can align our efforts?	Collaboration
I don't work on weekends.	My typical working hours are from Monday to Friday. For weekend work, we can discuss how best to address emerging issues at a flexible rate.	Setting boundaries
I don't work on more than # revisions.	I can help resolve emerging issues and make up to [#] revisions, but I'm open to discussing a new rate for additional revision rounds.	Setting boundaries
You're wrong.	That's a helpful perspective. I see it a bit differently, though — here's why...	Avoiding conflicts
I'm fed up.	I'm feeling overwhelmed by [issue]. Can we connect to discuss the best way forward?	Avoiding conflicts
This is too much.	Given my current commitments, taking on this task could cause me to stretch too thin. I'm open to discussing alternatives.	Addressing burnout
I can't do this anymore.	I need to take time to recharge and build my productivity level. How can we keep the project moving during my short break?	Addressing burnout