

## WORDS

**58. "What Do You Think?"** Our colleague Dave Wheeler said, in a Comment at [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com): "The four most important words in management are ... 'What do you think?'" I agree! And the old engineer in me screams: Quantify! So: How many times today did you "use the four words"? I.e., *exactly* how many times did you utter: "What do you think?"

Maybe go so far as to put this idea in the formal "values statement":

*"We obsessively ask 'What do you think?'—We understand that we rise or fall on the engagement and intelligence and constant contributions of 100% of us."*

## **59. "Thank You"**

*"The deepest human need is the need to be appreciated."*—William James, premier American psychologist

*"You shouldn't be looking for people slipping up, you should be looking for all the good things people do and praising those."*—Richard Branson

There's no overestimating the power of appreciation—and yet its application is usually stingy at best. Hence, as in so many of these "discussions of the obvious," this is a genuine skill to be practiced, mastered and applied. And, again, please think about it, perhaps "Thank you" ought to gain a place of honor in the values statement: *"We habitually express appreciation for one another's efforts—because we do in fact consciously appreciate everyone's 'ordinary' 'daily' contributions, let alone the extraordinary ones."* Or words to that effect ...

## **60. "I'm Sorry."**

Message: THIS IS A BIG DEAL. THIS IS "STRATEGIC."

*"I regard apologizing as the most magical, healing, restorative gesture human beings can make. It is the centerpiece of my work with executives who want to get better."*—Marshall Goldsmith, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful* (Goldsmith is perhaps the world's most prominent executive coach.)

Repeat: "centerpiece of my work with executives who want to get better."

Like Goldsmith, I believe that a genuine apology (and there's a lot to write, which space here does not permit, about "genuine") is of the utmost personal and strategic importance—and, indeed, worthy of using the label "magical."

As I have become convinced of the power (personal, professional, magical) of apology, I have actually accumulated a small library of books on the topic—yes, there is such a library available on apology per se. One is left with an encompassing sense of the extraordinary power of the ... Art of Apology ... rightfully considered. I believe we are talking about, in practical business terms, a ... "matchless strategic lever." In the arsenal of what really matters when it comes to getting things done/execution/ implementation, there are few—if any—"power tools" that have the heft of:

*"I apologize."*

*"I'm sorry."*

*"I'm to blame."*

*"Simply put, I screwed up."*

*"I bear full responsibility for this f\*\*\*-up."*

*"I blew it. Period."*

Bonus: Often as not, an Effective Apology is far more than a "bullet dodged." That is, not only is a problem cleared up, but also the cock-up brilliantly and overwhelmingly and unequivocally atoned for solidifies a relationship—and carries it forward.

### **61. Words of Truth—from a Fiction Writer**

*"Why not just tell the truth?"*—Raymond Carver, premier American short-story writer

This document is #16 in a series of 48 highlights from Tom Peters' *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence* (HarperStudio, 2010). For more information, visit [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com).

