



## No offense, but you're a terrible person: the dangers of "license to kill" phrases

OK, so this may not be one of my best blog titles but I thought it very appropriate to illustrate an observation to which we can all relate. After all, 'tis the season for feedback! Companies with June 30th year-ends are likely in the throes of performance evaluations and annual reviews. This time of year can be a tense and nervous part of our job; especially for managers new to the performance review process. But don't worry, nervousness is natural and you can calm those butterflies with good preparation, due diligence and a little bit of empathy for the person receiving the feedback. It does get easier with practice and the more feedback you provide, the more natural it becomes.

So, in the spirit of feedback, I was pondering a few traps we can all fall into. Two of the worst phrases I heard recently at a training event I was facilitating are: "No, offense, but..." and "...just sayin'." I have termed these types of phrases as "license to kill" phrases; they give the speaker temporary license to be destructive, say whatever he or she wants without consequence or accountability and abandon common sense. This all led me to the conclusion that:

Nothing good ever comes from beginning a conversation with *No offense, but...* or ending with *...just sayin'*. Let me illustrate:

*You really bombed that presentation, just sayin'...*

*No offense, but you don't really screwed that up meeting.*

*You really don't know how to use Excel, do you? Just sayin'...*

*No offense, but you look like hell.*

*The quality of your work sucks, just sayin'...*

*No offense, but your cooking is awful.*

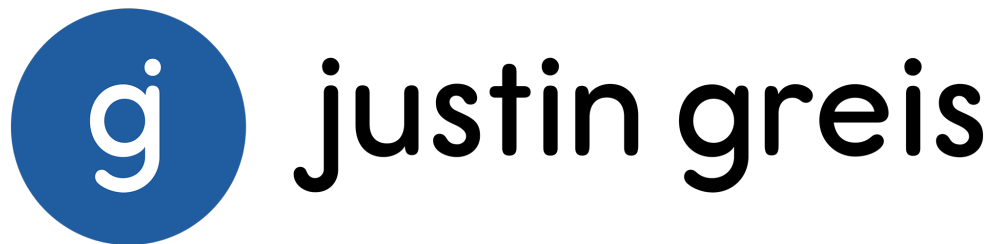
Pretty funny, right? But how often do we hear these types of phrases? It's as if the addition of *just sayin'* makes everything OK or by prefacing a hurtful statement with *no offense, but...* allows for abandoning of common courtesy and concern for the other person's feelings. *No offense, but* is an instant recognition that you are about to say something wrong, hurtful or inappropriate but are going to say it anyway. *Just sayin'* makes an excuse for the hurtful or inappropriate thing you just said, and for some reason, all is forgiven with the addition of that phrase.

**Jon Stewart** even pointed out how ridiculous this phrase is in response to CNN's segment called [believe it or not] "Just sayin'." No, seriously, CNN has a segment that features provocative topics and caps it off with a statement to promote conversation and public dialog about the idea. It's as if they recognize how ridiculous this trend is!

Sometimes these phrases are passed for directness or "being a straight-shooter," but in reality, these phrases are communication red flags. They can even be an indicator of malicious intent on the part of the speaker: he or she knows it is wrong to say it but he/she says it anyway. I don't think these phrases are

unique; there are lots of these “license to kill” phrases.

So, my advice to all of you in this season of self-improvement and feedback is: watch out for the telltale signs of these types of “license to kill” phrases. They make any feedback you provide indigestible, and chances are, the recipient of the feedback will completely discount everything you say after *No offense, but...* and just plain forget everything before *...just sayin'*. There are so many effective ways to be direct and give constructive feedback; just make sure you don't turn constructive feedback into a painful emotional scar.



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(nice to meet you)

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