

Words reflect workplace culture and can reinforce negative gender stereotypes.

Stop using these common words, which harm women's advancement opportunities, and focus on performance and outcomes instead.

IMPACT ON WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Can put women in a stressful double-bind where they are either too soft or too hard and never just right.

RESEARCH SAYS

ABRASIVE

"She comes across as abrasive."

To be perceived as competent leaders women are expected to be both assertive and warm.¹

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Shift attention away from style and focus on her work performance.

IMPACT ON WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Diminishes women's contributions, relegating them to "supporting" rather than "central/leading" roles.

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HELPFUL"She's so helpful."

RESEARCH SAYS

When women are praised for their supportiveness, they are less likely to be thought of as leaders.²

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Describe her contributions to the project or team.

IMPACT ON WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Puts unfair pressure on women to monitor and manage their emotional expressions.

EMOTIONAL

"She gets overly emotional."

RESEARCH SAYS

Women are seen as less competent and less deserving of high status positions when they display anger.³

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Describe the consequences of her behavior without using labels.

Undermines women's

Undermines women's identity and perceptions of their leadership abilities.

GRAVITAS

"She lacks leadership gravitas"

RESEARCH SAYS

Women are often not perceived as capable leaders, despite qualifications and performance.⁴

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Stop using code and explain what you mean other than "not her."

IMPACT ON WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Undermines and discredits women's competence and qualifications to offer critical feedback.

JUDGMENTAL

"She should stop being so judgmental."

RESEARCH SAYS

When a woman gives critical feedback, people may brush her off as being incompetent.⁵

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Don't make it about leadership style, but whether she is demonstrating good judgment.

PAY ATTENTION Is the language you use different for women and men? ASK FOR HELP Are you unintentionally holding women to a higher standard? Ask someone you trust to review your work for gendered language.

Sources:

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