# Old Language / New Language

**Notice how everyday language can quietly turn a moment into an identity.**

When time is short, a label is faster than a description. But a label can follow a person long after the moment has passed. Choose a phrase you have heard or used about a student, a colleague or yourself. The goal is not forced positivity. Keep the concern and the expectation while leaving room for growth.

**EXAMPLES**

| Old language | New language |
|---|---|
| "That student is disruptive." | "I'm seeing repeated interruptions. What might be happening, and what support and boundaries are needed?" |
| "She's not a team player." | "I've noticed we haven't been collaborating as expected. What might be contributing to that, and what expectations need to be clarified?" |
| "These teachers are resistant to change." | "Some educators have raised concerns about the proposed change. What are they experiencing that we may not yet understand?" |
| "I'm just not good at this." | "This is hard for me right now. What would help me practice?" |

## Words I have been using

Write the phrase as you have actually heard or said it.

## What does this phrase assume?

Does it describe an observable moment, or does it define the person?

## Words I am choosing now

Rewrite the phrase with accuracy, dignity and meaningful responsibility.

## How might this change my next interaction?

Identify one concrete behavior or question.

**FOR YOUR TEAM** "What language helps us hold expectations without treating people as finished conclusions?"

Describe the moment. Leave room for the person.

Mari Melendez-Davis | Human Strategist · Designed, Not Defined®

mari@empower-forward.com

empower-forward.com

A reflection tool, not a diagnosis. No student names or identifying details. Free to print and share. © 2026 Empower Forward