



"The Language Decoder"

Instructions: Your words reveal your true intentions, even when you don't realize it. This decoder helps you identify the specific language patterns that signal hold-back behavior in real-time. For one week, track your conversations, emails, and meetings using this guide-focusing on how you speak about your team members' capabilities, not just advancement discussions.

Part 1: The Hold-Back Dictionary

What You Say vs. What You Actually Mean:

"They're not quite ready yet" (about any new responsibility)

- *Translation:* I'm not ready to lose control
- *Red Flag:* You haven't defined what "ready" means or created a path to get there

"We need them here right now"

- *Translation:* My convenience trumps their growth
- *Red Flag:* You're prioritizing short-term stability over development

"They should get more experience first"

- *Translation:* I haven't invested in their development but need an excuse
- *Red Flag:* You can't specify what experience or how they'll get it

"They seem happy where they are"

- *Translation:* I haven't asked what they actually want
- *Red Flag:* You're assuming contentment to avoid growth conversations

"Let's focus on current responsibilities"

- *Translation:* I'm shutting down growth discussions
- *Red Flag:* You redirect development conversations back to status quo

"I don't want to overwhelm them"

- *Translation:* I don't want to challenge my comfort zone
- *Red Flag:* You're deciding their capacity without asking them



Part 2: Daily Language Tracking

Track these conversations for 7 days:

When discussing assignments:

- How often you default to the same people for new projects
- When you say someone "isn't ready" for stretch assignments
- How you describe team members' capabilities to others
- Language around who gets development opportunities

When talking about your team to others:

- Do you emphasize their current value or their growth potential?
- How you describe their skills to upper management
- Whether you mention their career aspirations
- How you position them for visibility opportunities

In performance discussions:

- Focus on what they're doing wrong vs. what they could achieve
- Whether conversations center on current role vs. future possibilities
- How you respond when they express interest in new challenges
- Language around their "ceiling" or limitations

Part 3: The Email Test

Review your last 10 emails about team members. Count:

- References to what they "should" focus on (current role vs. growth)
- Times you mention their limitations but not their development needs
- How you describe their readiness for new opportunities
- Whether you position them as replaceable or irreplaceable

Part 4: Meeting Pattern Analysis

In your next 3 team meetings, notice:

- When growth topics arise, do you redirect to current work?
- Do you speak about employee potential in limiting terms?
- How you assign new projects or opportunities
- Whether you ask about career interests or only discuss current tasks



Part 5: The Internal Dialogue Check

Track your thoughts when:

- A team member expresses interest in something new
- You're deciding who gets a development opportunity
- You consider recommending someone for advancement
- You think about your team's future composition

Part 6: The Mirror Moment

After tracking for one week, answer:

- What patterns emerged in how you discuss your team's potential?
- Do you more often limit or expand their possibilities through your language?
- When do you switch into "protection mode" thinking?
- How often do your words actually support growth versus subtly maintain status quo?

Closing Insight: Your language patterns reveal the unconscious beliefs driving your behavior. If your default response to growth opportunities is limitation-focused thinking, you're not managing strategically-you're managing from fear. You don't need formal promotion discussions to hold people back; you do it every day through how you speak about their capabilities and assign opportunities.