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Famous quotes, the way a woman would have to say them during a meeting.



Jennifer Lawrence is the latest celebrity to take on Hollywood's gender pay gap. (Video: Erin Patrick O'Connor/Photo: © Phil McCarten / Reuters/The Washington Post)

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"A few weeks ago at work," Jennifer Lawrence wrote in an essay for Lenny (yup, I guess I'm subscribed to Lenny now! Well played, Lena Dunham). "I spoke my mind and gave my opinion in a clear and no-[BS] way; no aggression, just blunt. The man I was working with (actually, he was working for me) said, 'Whoa! We're all on the same team here!' As if I was yelling at him. I was so shocked because nothing that I said was personal, offensive, or, to be honest, wrong. All I hear and see all day are men speaking their opinions, and I give mine in the same exact manner, and you would have thought I had said something offensive."

Nailed it.

"Woman in a Meeting" is a language of its own.

It should not be, but it is. You will think that you have stated the case simply and effectively, and everyone else will wonder why you were so Terrifyingly Angry. Instead, you figure out how to say it as though you were offering a groveling apology for an unspecified error. (In fact, as [Sloane Crosley pointed out in an essay](#) earlier this year, the time you are most likely to say "I'm sorry" is the time when you feel that you, personally, have just been grievously wronged. Not vice versa.)

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To illustrate this difficulty, I have taken the liberty of translating some famous sentences into the phrases a woman would have to use to say them during a meeting not to be perceived as angry, threatening or (gasp!) bitchy.

"Give me liberty, or give me death."

Woman in a Meeting: "Dave, if I could, I could just — I just really feel like if we had liberty it would be terrific, and the alternative would just be awful, you know? That's just how it strikes me. I don't know."

"I have a dream today!"

Woman in a Meeting: "I'm sorry, I just had this idea — it's probably crazy, but — look, just as long as we're throwing things out here — I had sort of an idea or vision about maybe the future?"

"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

Woman in a Meeting: "I'm sorry, Mikhail, if I could? Didn't mean to cut you off there. Can we agree that this wall maybe isn't quite doing what it should be doing? Just looking at everything everyone's been saying, it seems like we could consider removing it. Possibly. I don't know, what does the room feel?"

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"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

Woman in a Meeting: "I have to say — I'm sorry — I have to say this. I don't think we should be as scared of non-fear things as maybe we are? If that makes sense? Sorry, I feel like I'm rambling."

"Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country."

Woman in a Meeting: "I'm not an expert, Dave, but I feel like maybe you could accomplish more by maybe shifting your focus from asking things from the government and instead looking at things that we can all do ourselves? Just a thought. Just a thought. Take it for what it's worth."

"Let my people go."

Woman in a Meeting: "Pharaoh, listen, I totally hear where you're coming from on this. I totally do. And I don't want to butt in if you've come to a decision here, but, just, I have to say, would you consider that an argument for maybe releasing these people could conceivably have merit? Or is that already off the table?"

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"I came. I saw. I conquered."

Woman in a Meeting: "I don't want to toot my own horn here at all but I definitely have been to those places and was just honored to be a part of it as our team did such a wonderful job of conquering them."

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

Woman in a Meeting: "I'm sorry, it really feels to me like we're all equal, you know? I just feel really strongly on this."

"I have not yet begun to fight."

Woman in a Meeting: "Dave, I'm not going to fight you on this."

"I will be heard."

Woman in a Meeting: "Sorry to interrupt. No, go on, Dave. Finish what you had to say."

Alexandra Petri is a Washington Post columnist offering a lighter take on the news and opinions of the day. She is the author of the new essay collection "Nothing Is Wrong And Here Is Why." Follow [@petri](#)

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