

SEASON 1 · EPISODE 3 · FROM PEER TO LEADER

Managing Former Friends

The friendship isn't the problem — the pretending is. A best friend at work makes you about seven times more likely to be engaged, so don't dissolve it. Every hard moment with them is two conversations: one inside you, one across the table.

SEE IT · SAY IT · LEAD

1 THE VENT YOU CAN'T JOIN ANYMORE

SEE IT — INSIDE YOU

The sentence that fires: "If I don't join in, I'm not their friend anymore." It's protecting your picture of yourself as the one who didn't change.

SAY IT — TO YOURSELF

"The boundary isn't the snub. The silence is."

SEE IT — ACROSS FROM YOU

Your old agreeing reflex is now a leak. Going quiet reads as a verdict you wouldn't say to their face; naming the change is a boundary.

SAY IT — OUT LOUD

"I care about what's frustrating you, and I want to hear the concern. I can't join in the venting the way I used to, because I'm responsible for handling it fairly. Tell me what you need me to understand, and I'll be clear about what I can and can't do."

2 THE FAVOR THAT DIDN'T FEEL LIKE A FAVOR

SEE IT — INSIDE YOU

The sentence that fires: "It's just them. This isn't a manager thing." It's protecting you from ever making your friend ask.

SAY IT — TO YOURSELF

"The danger isn't the no. It's the yes I can't explain."

SEE IT — ACROSS FROM YOU

Only 45% of employees say their manager avoids playing favorites, and the manager is the worst-placed judge. Your read isn't evidence — say the standard out loud.

SAY IT — OUT LOUD

"Here's the standard I'm using: I'd make the same decision for anyone in a comparable situation. Based on that standard, this one is a yes."

3 THE DAY YOU HAVE TO CORRECT THEM

SEE IT — INSIDE YOU

The sentence that fires: "If I bring this up, I'm choosing the job over them." It's protecting your comfort, not their reputation.

SAY IT — TO YOURSELF

"Silence isn't protecting them. It's protecting me."

SEE IT — ACROSS FROM YOU

Perceived favoritism erodes trust and commitment, and every week you wait, the conversation gets bigger. Your friend is testing whether you respect them enough to be honest.

SAY IT — OUT LOUD

"I want to be direct with you as your manager. The last two reports came in late, and Friday's report needs to be on time. What's getting in the way, and what support do you need from me to meet that expectation?"

TRY ONE THIS WEEK

1. Catch the sentence before you answer the next vent — then say the vent line instead of changing the subject.
2. Say the same-decision-for-anyone standard out loud before the next favor, not after.
3. Have the small correction this week, badly, while it's still a quiet word.

Pick just one — small reps beat big plans. Want the five-day version? Grab a Challenge Sheet at theworkingleader.com/challenge-sheets.

LEAD

You don't protect a friendship by avoiding the manager conversation. You protect it by having it early, while it's still small enough to have — and by seeing what's stopping you first. **The first person you lead is you.**

You can do this!
— Matt

REMEMBER THIS

"Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind."

— BRENÉ BROWN

Every bit of vagueness you're using to protect this friendship feels generous and is not.

GO DEEPER

Grab the free starter toolkit — checklists, scripts, and this week's challenge — at theworkingleader.com.

YOUR NOTES · THE SENTENCE YOU CAUGHT · THE ONE THING YOU'LL DO DIFFERENTLY