



Manager Tools LLC

Shownotes
And Not But Meeting Ground Rule

[Blog Post]

This guidance recommends a standing ground rule at all meetings: No “buts,” only “and”.

[Cast]

The most frequent behavior we all engage in at work is communication. And, for most of us, we don't think about it much. We were never really “taught” how to communicate, though we did “learn” it.

This creates problems for us at work, though. We “learned” when we weren't in a professional environment. And the professional environment requires us to work in close proximity to others. We bring our “learned” behaviors. They bring theirs. Thus, conflict. It's time to start learning new behaviors.

1. Set a Ground Rule For All Meetings – No Buts
2. And Can Always Replace But
3. Try Two Sentences Period No Comma
4. Institute Fines! :-)

1. Set a Ground Rule For All Meetings – No Buts. If you're running a meeting the Manager Tools Effective Meetings way, you've set ground rules. [If not, or you don't even know what ground rules are...go to <http://www.manager-tools.com/2008/11/facilitating-ground-rules-to-start-a-meeting> and <http://www.manager-tools.com/2005/08/effective-meetings-get-out-of-jail>. Once you've gone through the Effective Meetings protocol, add this ground rule when you're setting them up, or you could wait a bit until everyone sees the value of ground rules.]

In your next meeting, announce a new ground rule. Call it the “No Buts” rule. Rather than explaining it to you here in this guidance, we'll tell you what to say to your team.

*I'm adding a new ground rule. It's called the No Buts Rule. It's really simple. The use of the word 'but' is now specifically prohibited in our meetings. But is a word that we all use, and it will be hard at first. We won't even realize we're saying it until someone points it out. When someone does use it, and you hear it, point it out. Just politely interrupt, and say, “you said but.” If *I* say it, please do the same to me. Ask the person to rephrase what they said. There are several ways they can do that. [Examples below.]*

The point here is that when we do use it, we separate ourselves. Everyone can tell, when you want to make a different point or disagree, or challenge someone, everyone can tell that you're doing so. We don't need to make it worse by using but to make it crystal clear we don't agree. It's okay to disagree...but let's not revel in it.

2. And Can Always Replace But. And and but are parts of our speech that are called conjunctions. Conjunctions are words that are used to connect other words or groups of words. But says, these things are different. But SAYS that. When used with the right intonation, it frankly SCREAMS that. There's the old saw that but secretly stands for "Behold my Underlying Truth."

Most people can figure it out, though, without that but screaming out the difference. Consider this simple example: *We were going to buy the copier, but it cost too much.* You're probably thinking, well that's a perfect use of the conjunction but. It tells everyone, clearly, *hey, you need to know something's coming that is not what you expect! It's almost an alert.*

Think again. Here's that sentence again, altered. *We were going to buy the copier, and it cost too much.* No question, is there, about the message? Nope. You know what happened. They didn't buy the copier.

And can always replace but as a conjunction, because and is the simplest conjunction, and but implies something more complex. But cannot always replace and. Think of: *We were going to buy the copier, and we had the money,* versus, *We were going to buy the copier but we had the money.* Doesn't work.

The point is, we can simply substitute AND for BUT in every use. Here's how it might sound:

*Instead of using but, I recommend simply substituting the word and in it's place. Consider this simple example: **We were going to buy the copier, but it cost too much.** You're probably thinking, well that's a perfect use of the conjunction but. It tells everyone, clearly, hey, you need to know something's coming that is not what you expect! It's almost an alert. Think again. Here's that sentence again, altered. **We were going to buy the copier, and it cost too much.** No question, is there, about the message? Nope. You know what happened. They didn't buy the copier.*

*Let's make it harder, about work more. Consider: **John thinks the budget can be reduced, but I disagree.** This is a great example where one might very well reasonably WANT to make a distinction, a difference, obvious. But, though, makes the disagreement more stark, almost emotional, as opposed to just two ideas, different in some way. Not about the ideas, anymore, when you say but. Now it's about US. Consider: **John thinks the budget can be reduced, and I disagree.** That not only makes the point that we don't agree, but it also honors **both sides of the argument.***

And, folks, do we even need to talk about however? This is the verbal dodge of the wolf in sheep's clothing, sounding erudite while killing the other idea. It's almost WORSE than but. And says there are two different ideas here. But says there are two different ideas one of which, mine, is better. However says, there are two different ideas here, mine is better, and in part it's because *I'm smarter than you.*

And is someone right now thinking about *though*? Glad we cleared that up.

And we wonder why we can't all just get along?

3. Try Two Sentences Period No Comma. The other neat trick you can use to eliminate but as your go to conjunction is to eliminate its use with commas. The examples we've used above are all uses of but after a comma, connecting two ideas or phrases into a compound sentence. And, (not but ;-)) We can use the good writing trick of NOT saying or writing a compound sentence. Eliminate the comma, put a period there, and start the next sentence without any conjunction at all (or and if you must.)

For instance: ***We were going to buy the copier. It cost too much.*** This is actually better writing and speaking. Some would argue that. Short sentences with less commas are almost always more clear. ***John thinks the budget can be reduced. I disagree.***

4. Institute Fines! 😊 Something we've used to make behavior changes that seem small but sometimes are a struggle is to institute small fines to lighten the moment. Frankly, some folks' use of phrases or parts of speech are so deeply ingrained that they will argue that they "didn't DO that" or get easily irritated at being corrected. Perhaps, even, the same ones who have a problem with polite and small feedback. The fines – a nickel, a dime, a quarter, nothing noteworthy. A dollar is probably too much, folks.

Wrap Up

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We're not big on role power at Manager Tools. But this is a brilliant use of it. Your team is using but as a way of making disagreements bigger. They use but to highlight the tension, admittedly or not. It's a simple thing to change, and you can lead the way. It's okay to have two competing ideas in a room – it's good even. But ideas can compete without fighting.

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