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CHUCK TALK: Your word is your word regardless of the size of the commitment

BY CHUCK MACHE

I caution leaders all the time to never underestimate living up to the little commitments that they make in conversation with their people. What appear to be minor statements are not so small to those on the receiving end.

Comments like "I'll send you that article," or "I'll give you a call next week to discuss it further," create expectations. When we don't follow through, our credibility takes a hit. How many hits do we have in us before our effectiveness is severely impacted? My experience says it's less than you think.

Have you ever concluded a meeting with someone in which they pledged to get something specific done by a certain date only to have that date come and go without hearing or seeing anything?

How did you feel about them when they didn't come through? Were you disappointed, surprised or maybe you suspected they wouldn't follow through all along and this just validated your initial instincts about their character? If you had your choice, would you work with them in the future? It's happened to all of us. Somebody says they are going to do something and they don't.

In fact, we've probably been on both ends of this one. I don't know anybody who hasn't at least once missed a deadline on a commitment. Any way you look at it, the key to business is relationships. Relationships are built on trust, and trust is almost always developed over time. It all starts, however, with doing the little things we say we are going to do.

We've all experienced things like:

--"I'll get you that proposal by the 15th." The 15th comes and no proposal.

--"I'll follow up with you in one week." One week comes and no follow up.

--"I'll forward you that information right away." Right away just doesn't get here.

Let's make it even simpler. You sit down in a restaurant and order your food. At the end of ordering you say "And could I have some ice water please?" The waiter says, "Of course, I'll bring that right away." Five minutes go by and no ice water. Eventually, after you remind him to get the water, he does. Let me ask you this, does the incident affect his tip?

Let's face it, in business it is our job to continually advance issues. When we move issues and agendas forward, we create momentum. The most successful people have constant momentum. When we fail to live up to what we say we are going to do, our credibility can take a hit. That can create questions about our effectiveness. The bigger the question, the more our momentum takes a hit. I call that a set back. Sometimes it's a small set back with those on the receiving end simply making a mental note of us falling short of our word. And sometimes, when we neglect to fulfill our little commitments, it can be a deal killer. Why take the gamble? All we have is our word.

So this is the simple suggestion that I have. Always live up to your word, always hit your deadlines and always fulfill your commitments. Remember if you are a leader or a manager and you say "I'll send you those pictures," and you don't, you just became less effective. Remember if you are in sales and you say "I'll send you that comparative when I get back to my office," and you don't, you may face some objections that you can't overcome because they will be about your character. And if something gets between you and getting it done, then communicate it to the person you've committed to. They will respect you for it, and it won't hinder your momentum.

Those who are the very best at what they do know just how powerful their little commitments are. Their word is often the tipping point that differentiates them from all others. Leader, manager, sales rep – it doesn't matter. I suggest that the next time you say "I'll get back to you tomorrow" that you make sure that you do.

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Chuck Mache, president of Chuck Mache Communications, is a speaker, executive coach and consultant. His work is dedicated to helping companies and individuals break through to their next level, and he is the bestselling author of the "The Four Kinds of Sales People: How and Why They Excel and How You Can Too." Learn more and sign up for Chuck's complementary monthly newsletter at www.ChuckMache.com.