

## As Promised: The Power of Keeping Your Word

I live in Toronto and those of you who also live here, or who have visited here, will probably recognize “the PATH”, that maze of halls and retail space that connects virtually all of the buildings in the downtown core to each other. It’s a city under the city populated by lawyers, bankers, accountants and other professionals and the staff who support their firms.

Seldom do I go through the PATH from one client meeting to another without bumping into at least one person that I know. It’s also a great place to people watch. At any given time chance meetings are happening throughout these corridors, food courts and stores. Here’s what I have observed.

These chance meetings usually begin with a smile. One person says “how are you” and doesn’t really want an answer. The other person replies with a nod and something like “how are things going”.



by Karen MacKay, MBA, CHRP  
President

“Busy, really busy” is the typical response because for some reason we take pride in being very very busy. In the rush back to the office with a cell phone in one hand and a PDA buzzing in a pocket they rush off with “I’ll call you” or “let’s get together for lunch”... “yeah sure...”.

This sounds a bit like Andy Rooney on 60 Minutes, but in any building in any city in this country, this kind of interaction happens every minute of every day. So why the rant? Because building your client base, building your profile and building a perception of who you are in the marketplace is all about reputation. It takes a life time to build your reputation and a few minutes to lose it.

The insincerity expressed in these chance meetings is no longer noticed because insincerity is so common.

However, when someone actually does call to continue the conversation after one of these chance meetings, *it is noticed*. When someone actually calls to book lunch after one of these chance meetings, *it is noticed*. When someone actually follows through on a promise, *it is noticed*, because so often it does not happen.

In our extremely busy lives, how can we be expected to remember all the people we meet, even briefly, on any given day? **Tip: use that cell phone in your hand to leave yourself a voicemail message with the details of who you met and what you want to do next.** Your brain can only handle so much on a given day, so get it off your plate and forget about it until you get back to your desk, and then deal with it.

We’ve all had the experience of leaving a meeting with a client or colleague, with a promise to get some information to that individual. (This usually happens on the way to the elevator well after you have put pen and paper away.) It could be a copy of a

document, a phone number or some other bit of information that the client or colleague needs. When I forward the information agreed upon, I always use “as promised” in the subject line of my email. Why? Because I want my clients, prospective clients, colleagues and friends to know that if I promise to get them something, I will do it. I want to differentiate myself through small gestures as well as through big deliverables. It is often the small gestures that reward you with the big opportunities.

Marketing is about raising *awareness and recognition* – letting people know who you are and what you can do. How can you find ongoing appropriate opportunities to talk to your clients, prospective clients, colleagues and referral sources? Marketing is about creating a perception. Do you want to be perceived as someone who delivers the goods? Marketing is also about differentiating yourself. How can you take advantage of the little opportunities to differentiate yourself?

Relationships are built through networking. Building and maintaining relationships with those clients, prospective clients, colleagues and referral sources requires constant nurturing and attention. It requires following through on your promises – big and small, because networking is essentially about exchanging resources and those promises are the currency.

I think it was the world-renowned guru on professional services, author and former Harvard University professor, David H. Maister who said:

*“They need to know that you care, before they care what you know”.*



Following through on your promises is a clear indication that you care. Who knows, you might get the opportunity to show them what you know - sooner than you think.

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