

Keep your promises

SET A STANDARD THAT BUILDS TRUST AND INTEGRITY IN ALL YOU DO.



“Are you coming?” The text message from my friend Sam flashed on my phone just as I was beginning an important meeting. In an instant, I realized what I had done.

One week earlier, I had seen Sam in the airport, and after catching up briefly, Sam had suggested that we have lunch sometime soon. When I enthusiastically agreed, he said “How about next Tuesday?” I knew that I was not traveling that day, so I accepted and made a mental note to check my calendar later to be sure I was really open.

By the time I left the airport, my mental note was lost. When Tuesday arrived, I was starting a meeting in my office while my friend Sam was waiting at our favorite restaurant. When I called to explain, the disappointment in his voice was clear, but what he said struck me to the heart.

“I understand what happened, but I wouldn’t have expected it to happen with you,” he said.

I can still feel the sting of those words, but I also know that they taught me one of the most valuable lessons in the business of life: the importance of keeping your promises.

Keep the promises you make through your words.

When I accepted Sam’s invitation without knowing whether I was available, I made a promise that I was not fully committed to keep. But when I failed to even write it down, I reduced the level of my commitment, and the value of my word, to almost nothing.

When you make a promise, are you absolutely committed to following through, or is the phrase “if I can” the unspoken caveat behind your words?

Sometimes, the pressure to accept an invitation or agree to a deadline is so strong that you commit without knowing whether you can really deliver. Even if there are consequences to saying no, the risk of saying yes when you’re not sure is greater because you are gambling on two fronts.

First, you are gambling with your own integrity, and if you fail, you’re risking damage to trust that is hard to rebuild. Second, you are gambling with the integrity of the person to whom you’ve committed, because he or she has likely made other commitments based on your promise to deliver.

I did not know that Sam had invited his son to join us for lunch that day, promising that I would be able to offer guidance on a career decision he was facing. By disappointing my friend Sam, I also caused him to disappoint his son.

Starting today, resolve that every promise you make will be one that you can, and will, keep, barring only catastrophic circumstances. Don’t say you will complete the report by noon, assuming that delivery by 3 p.m. will probably be acceptable.

Instead, set the higher standard of saying what you will do, and then doing what you say.

If you do this consistently, you will become known as a person who can be trusted and that trust will become the foundation for success in your career and your relationships.

Keep the promises you make through the life you lead.

The painful experience of disappointing my friend was made worse by my being the author of a book on character and authenticity in life — a book that both Sam and his son had read.

It’s important to remember that in every belief you express, in every role you accept and in every aspect of the image you project, you are making promises — promises for authenticity, integrity and consistency — promises to which your life makes you accountable.

Before you talk about your values or accept a leadership role where certain attributes are implied, understand that from that moment you will be expected to live up to them. No one expects you to be perfect, but these decisions set a standard — one which you will have to strive for consistently.

Thankfully, my lunch with Sam and his son was rescheduled and our friendship remains strong and vibrant. But I have not forgotten the lessons I learned that day.

Be careful to make promises you can keep, and be committed to keep the promises you make, and you will build trust and integrity in all you do. <<

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