

The old fashioned handshake and the new face of integrity

By Karen Natzel, business therapist, k communications

The icon of an “old school contractor” is the handshake and back-of-the-napkin agreement. It’s nostalgic; it’s tied inextricably to our sense of work ethic, pride, and code of conduct. In a word: Integrity. Integrity is touted by so many businesses as a core value that it’s all but lost its essence. Yet, when we come from a place of integrity we are speaking our truth with transparency. We are being congruent - what we say is what we mean. Our word *is* the contract.

The Power of Giving Your Word

Today, we rely on legally binding written contracts, which hold their own kind of power and purpose. And while these contracts are critical to defining scope and mitigating your risks, they represent a narrow definition of “agreement”. When we speak, we give our word, and when we give our word, we are making an agreement. In other words, agreements are contracts. We make agreements all day long with ourselves and our colleagues, employees, clients, family members and friends. (*I’ll go to the gym tomorrow, I’ll make that marketing call, I’ll call our insurance provider to review next year’s health care plans, I’ll get my expense report to you by Friday, I’ll get you that budget tomorrow, I’ll call you later, I’ll be home by 6:00 for dinner, I’ll review those cost projections in the morning, etc.*). And yet, if you’re like most business leaders, most of those well-intentioned agreements (your word), fell short of delivering what you said you would.

Agreements have the power to transform. When you agree with something, you *believe* it. What you believe fuels your thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. If, for example, you agree with your controller that the financial projections are reliable and accurate, you believe they are and act accordingly. This is why it’s important to be aware of the numerous agreements you have made, with yourself and with others, and to understand the enormous value of keeping them.

The impacts of breaking (or keeping) our agreements

Have you ever been on the receiving end of someone breaking an agreement with you? Not only can it be frustrating and disappointing, it can drain integrity, confidence and trust. Depending on the severity and frequency, it can deteriorate the relationship. On an individual level it can diminish one’s sense of self worth, deplete one’s energy, increase self-doubt and create a state of inertia. There are also negative business impacts in the form of inefficiencies, lack of professionalism, a reduction in productivity, tarnished reputations, lawsuits and an “us vs. them” culture. Now, flip that upside down. By keeping agreements, trust, confidence and integrity are built, relationships are enhanced, traction is realized, efficiency is increased, and momentum builds.

First Agreement: Be impeccable with your word.

I deliver a training program based on the book, “The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom” (*Don Miguel, The New York Time’s Bestseller List*). This book invites its readers to adopt a deceptively simple set of principles as one’s own personal code of conduct. In the training we examine how the four agreements, when practiced together, provide a powerful, accountable and respectful way to relate to ourselves and each other. The first of these agreements is: **Be impeccable with your word.** Not only does

this denote speaking with integrity by saying only what you mean, but according to the author, it also implies the avoidance of “using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others.” If this sounds easy, practice it for just one day. See what you discover!

Take the K Challenge: I encourage you to think about making and keeping agreements as a positive, conscious choice that contributes to your vitality, energy and to your relationships (not something someone is making you do.) Pay attention to what agreements you make. (*Hint: only make ones you can keep!*). If you must change a previously made agreement, re-negotiate with yourself or others in advance of having to break it. You’ll reap the benefits of being impeccable with your word, and earn that touted core value of “integrity”. Start walking your talk. *What are you giving your word to?*

If you would like more information on the Four Agreements, drop me an email requesting the Four Agreements Training Overview PDF. Karen Natzel, Business Therapist | Karen@natzel.net | 503.806.4361 | www.biztherapy.biz

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