



## Management and Performance Associates – July 2006 Agreements

*“Men keep agreements when it is to the advantage of neither to break them.”*

*Solon (638 BC - 559 BC)*

Have you ever expected someone to do something, only to learn later that it was not done on time or worse, it was done but it was not what you were expecting? The million dollar question is: Why don't people do what we want them to do? This can happen at home (You were expecting your spouse to do the dishes...) or in the office (The report a staff member was preparing did not include the topics you wanted...). In this newsletter we explore why agreements are not followed through and provide you with hints to effectively negotiate with others.

Non-verbalized expectations are the root of the problem. Let's be honest, if you expect your spouse to do the dishes, but you never talked about it, then why do you get frustrated when the dishes are piled up after dinner?

These are five easy hints to effectively negotiate your next agreement. Use these five steps to plan the conversation, and keep them in front of you as the discussion progresses.

1. **Be specific of what you expect the other person to do.** Saying “I need this presentation for Monday morning” is not enough. What the main messages are; what you expect to be included; how you want it presented; how long; and finally, whether Monday morning is the final deadline or you need to review it the Friday before so that you feel comfortable with it on Monday morning, should all be communicated.
2. **Explain the importance of the task.** Many times we just assume the other party understands the importance of the task; how it is connected to the macro strategy; what the context is; and finally, why *they* have to

do it. Perhaps they do, but it is their view of the situation, not yours. We need to make them explicit.

3. **Explore the obstacles in accomplishing the task.** How realistic can an agreement be if we do not talk about obstacles? Ask about them, do not tell or assume that you know what is in the way. When the other party volunteers the first one don't jump to problem solving or worse, blaming. Instead, keep asking: “What other obstacles are preventing you from preparing this presentation by Friday at 3 p.m.?” Only after all obstacles are laid out on the table you can start planning how to overcome them.
4. **Negotiate a plan to overcome obstacles.** What can we do about it? Remember this is not about giving orders or winning an argument. If you want to improve or “just to maintain” the relationship then you need to take the other party's needs and interests into consideration.
5. **Follow up.** The longer the deadline the higher the need to follow up. (Careful, follow-up is not micromanaging and controlling every single step of the task.) Imagine you have the expectation that your staff member will be ready for the May sales convention (“Come on! The guy has three months to prepare...”) but if you never approached the subject during the three months, who is really to be blamed if he is not ready for the show? You are.

If you follow the above steps chances are your agreement will be followed through by the other party. And then, what should you do? Most people do nothing about it; don't even acknowledge the fact that the task was accomplished on time and within the quality standards. Once again we are assuming. We are assuming that it was their job. Perhaps, but if you want to keep working on the relationship the



minimum you need to do is to recognize the person.

For recognizing others you don't need to get out of your way, or spend a lot of time, or money. A quick "Thank You" note (not an email – a handwritten note will make it more personal) describing the specifics of what the person has done, and the impact it had on you will suffice. It's amazing what this can do to keep the other party's motivation. You are buying credit for the future. Next time (and you know there will be a next time, right?) the other person will be more willing to enter into an agreement with you.

**See you next time. We welcome your feedback.**

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