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Reasons Why People Fail To Honor Their Commitments

By Sherry Greenleaf

In a recent discussion with another coach, we touched on the fact that many people say “yes” to coaching when they really aren’t sure they want to be in a coaching relationship. They say “yes” and then do not follow up with commitments made during a coaching session and often cancel scheduled coaching sessions or do not acknowledge emails or return voice mail messages.

These may be the same people who also do not understand why they continue to have challenges in taking on new behaviors that require a commitment to change.

Webster’s definition of commitment is: “...to bind as by a promise; to pledge”. So making a promise is a commitment to take action.

With that in mind, let’s explore some reasons why people fail to honor their commitments.

Differing Priorities.

If you ask someone to do something and they agree to do it, does that agreement include a common understanding of the urgency and immediacy of the task involved? Often not. Each person has his or her own set of priorities, but all too frequently, these differences are not discussed. In such instances, it helps to clarify. Example: “You said that it is really important that this get done by Tuesday morning at 9:00 am. Will you be able to meet that deadline?”

As the coach, you can ask a question about the task or project and uncover a potential obstacle. “What obstacles might keep you from meeting that deadline? The response will tell you where you

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need to spend more time in understanding the commitment as well as actions that will help them **do what they said they would do**. Task difficulty? Competing priorities? People? Resources? Helping someone to explore potential obstacles will help the person understand the impact of their commitment.

Poor Time Management.

Remember that old saying about the road to failure being paved with good intentions? Some people make promises truly intending to keep them, but then something always intervenes--a current project takes longer than expected, they didn't allow enough time to get there, they had to do just a little bit more before they left, etc.

At one time or another, we've probably all fallen into these traps ourselves. We get trapped because we have good motives: to get more done and make everyone happy. We push the clock to achieve more, more, more when we simply need to allow enough time to do the task or project rather than push against the deadline. One result of poor time management is that someone is inconvenienced and stress levels increase.

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Inflated Self-Importance.

Now this is delicate. Depending on who and what position you are coaching in an organization. Some people simply feel that others owe them a certain level of deference by virtue of their position, intelligence, wealth, or charisma. This type of client just doesn't feel that your concerns are as important as theirs, so when they fail to keep a commitment, they just don't believe it's important in *their* larger scheme of things.

Their inflated sense of ego pretty much guarantees that they won't be receptive to suggestions for improvement or be willing to understand how their lack of commitment impacts other's schedules or plans. **Caveat:** You may find yourself trying to "fix" this person and spending a great deal of time attempting to change them.

Having been in this situation with a client, my advice is "let go". All I did was to cater to their self importance.

Difficulty in saying "NO"

"Yes" is a great word that makes people happy, but if you never say "No", then your commitments will stack up, and your "Yes" will be worthless.

Work with your client to help them understand that saying yes can be construed as "crying wolf".

When you begin to say yes to everything and fail to meet your commitments, others will discount the "yes" and perhaps view it as a need to be "liked". Too many "yes's" can destroy others confidence in your ability to perform as expected. An occasional "No" adds value to the "Yes."

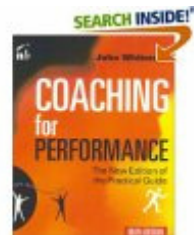
Procrastination.

Some people seem to be born procrastinators. No matter how little or how much they have to do, they always find reasons for postponing. If you find yourself dealing with a procrastinator, you might try walk them through a task or project to determine what the real reason is for putting it off.

If your client is truly interested in overcoming this limitation (and many realize that it keeps them in complaint, fear, or stress) you might try following a simple rule: every day, pick the most unpleasant and/or difficult chore from the to-do list and do it first. After doing this **consistently** for several days or weeks, the tendency to delay or find excuses becomes less of a problem.

One of the biggest challenges is letting your client identify themselves as a procrastinator. They begin to live into a behavior pattern simply because it has never been interrupted with positive feelings of accomplishment. Be sure to acknowledge any improvement in overcoming this self-imposed limitation.

Suggested Reading:



[Coaching for Performance, Third Edition \(People Skills for Professionals\)](#) by John Whitmore (Paperback - May 25, 2002)