

From: *The Chronicle Herald* – Jan. 3/08

Good intentions are not enough

HAVE YOU EVER had someone define an expectation and later found out what they said would happen didn't?

How did you feel about the leader after that incident?

I had a leader once say, after the fact, "You know, I really expected this training to happen for you, but once I started into it, I learned I couldn't make it happen. So it is the way it is."

As I reflected on that, I thought to myself, perhaps this is true. However, the leader promised it would not be an issue and didn't communicate any red flags or concern as to why I might not be able to attend the training.

Now I wondered if this person ever did anything or was ever aware of the number of times they sent out false expectations. I wonder if the leader ever got it that within a short time, he or she lost credibility with me. Even worse, I didn't trust or respect this person as my leader.

This reminds me of a sound piece of leadership advice: under-promise and over-deliver on what you say you can do. Also, keep in mind that good intentions alone are not enough to motivate and build trust in a workforce.

This is a simple coaching tip with powerful implications for a leader's credibility and capacity to motivate and influence people to follow them.

As a business coach, I have witnessed first-hand how leaders can quickly lose credibility with their teams by making decrees and calls to action and then not following through or making them happen.

There are many variables at play for any business leader, such as politics, the economy and business culture. One variable you don't want to face is loss of your peers' or employees' trust in your word.

For the most part, people in the workplace keep score through an evidence-based orientation, meaning all expectations are defined and set and are objectively measured.

For example, many companies post on their walls value statements that frame the expectations for the kind of workplace the organization is committed to. However, when managers fail to model the values by their behaviours, the intentions and purpose of the decree are lost.

This is a macro example but can be related to any leader. What leaders say they will do sets the expectations that people will objectively measure them



by. Falling short of these expectations will take away credibility and trust. Dos and Don'ts for Framing Expectations

- Do follow up on expectation timelines to ensure results have been obtained.
- Do keep in mind how important it is to help employees meet their needs in the workplace.
- Do accept expectations that have been discussed are important and will influence employees' views of your credibility.
- Do actively and openly discuss with employees any risks and challenges for meeting an expectation.
- Do engage employees in discussions when looking for solutions to achieve an outcome.
- Do write down and track your commitments (e.g., time frame, parties and expectations).
- Don't make absolute promises when there are other forces involved (e.g., other decision-makers).
- Don't avoid employees when you know an event or situation is not going to happen; share your information.
- Don't make any agreements without knowing all the facts.
- Don't make decisions and determine an action without knowing all the facts.
- Don't assume your employees know what you mean when framing an expectation. Simply ask: "OK, let's check to ensure we are all on the same page. What expectations are you hearing?"
- Don't make excuses. When you make a mistake, own it.

