

Promises

Most of us have heard all kinds of warnings and advice about making and keeping promises. I've mentioned in this column (probably a number of times!) the edict: *Under-promise and over-deliver*. It's a professional tenet I live by. However, in this article, I'm talking more about the warning my mother gave me as a child: *Never make a promise if you can't keep it*.

Beyond what is viewed as professional, and making mistakes/the ability to fix them, are the greater and more far-reaching consequences of making—and breaking—a promise.

Nietzsche said, "Not that you lied to me but that I no longer believe you - that is what has distressed me." I embrace this sentiment and most people do—without even realizing it. A broken promise equals a lie. A series of broken promises equals a liar.

How often has a friend or business associate made an appointment with you and then cancelled? You probably sympathized when her reason for cancelling was true illness, the death of her mother, half an airplane wing falling from the sky and ripping a hole in the roof of her house, or genuine urgencies of a similar nature. But did you sympathize when her reason for cancelling began with: a) *I'm so behind at work...*, b) *You wouldn't believe how busy I've been...* or c) *I think I have a touch of the flu...*

I don't know about you, but here's my initial and heartfelt reaction to the above reasons (aka excuses): a) *Something's always coming up at work and most of us operate from a position of being behind*, b) *Actually, yes, I would believe how busy you are. You see, my day has precisely the same number of hours yours has. You clearly feel that your 24 hours are more important than mine*, c) *No one gets a touch of the flu; check it out online: the flu lasts a*

minimum of 5 days and involves vomiting and other gross stuff, along with a fever. You clearly think I'm dumb enough to buy your even dumber excuse.

Are my reactions bit harsh? Maybe. Maybe not. If this person I had the appointment with is, let's say, my sister or my very good friend, I'm not as apt to be so unforgiving. After all, it's impossible to trade my sister in for a new one and almost as hard to replace a good friend. But if this person is a client or business acquaintance, then those are precisely my thoughts. Why?

How do I know she'll keep the next appointment we make? How do I know she hasn't used phony excuses before--or that she won't be using them in the future? What if she gets better at making up phony excuses? What if she's a LIAR – how will it affect my job, our relationship, or my company?

The best way to avoid having your broken promises be interpreted as lies is to keep them. The next best way is to be candid: don't make up an excuse, do show your respect for the other person's time, and do reschedule at THEIR convenience. Strike the proper balance between sincere apology and groveling—groveling is definitely the sign of a liar.

I promise you this: no one likes, or trusts, a liar.