

Checking Your Progress

To improve your time-management skills, give yourself a monthly or quarterly performance review. **Look back at your list of projects for this period of time, and:**

- ✓ *Track the goals that you had planned.* Examine your list for the tasks that you intended to accomplish, and note how many you actually completed.
- ✓ *Identify the obstacles that prevented you from finishing your work.* It may have been the result of poor planning, procrastination, or unforeseen circumstances.
- ✓ *Plan methods for avoiding similar obstacles in the future.* You may want to allow more time between stages in a project or to set yourself an earlier deadline.
- ✓ *Set one self-improvement goal.* Decide which aspect of time management you want to work on. Obtain the resources you need to make changes and post your goal in writing where you can see it.
- ✓ *Give yourself a pat on the back.* Enjoy the sense of accomplishment in the work you've done. Consider lessons learned that you can apply to future work.

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Teaching Time-Management Skills Early

Back-to-school time is a perfect opportunity to teach your children time-management skills. Learning simple strategies for organizing their time and belongings can enhance their ability to learn in the classroom as well.

To teach your kids skills that will help them excel in school:

- ▲ *Introduce methods for keeping supplies organized.*

Show your children how to arrange supplies in their desks and book bags so that they can find things easily. Teach them to label folders and notebooks, and suggest using different colored folders for different subjects.

- ▲ *Ask about their homework each night.* Find out what assignments they have to do and how long it will take to complete them. Then help them set up a schedule for getting them done. Include a fun activity as a reward for after homework is completed.
- ▲ *Plan larger projects in advance.* Provide chil-

dren with a calendar that they can use to write down due dates for big projects. Teach them to break these projects into smaller steps that they can do a little each day.

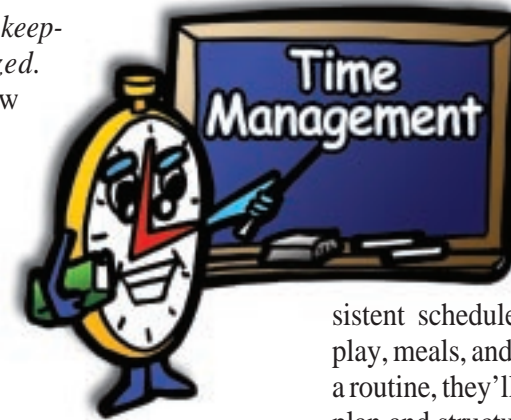
- ▲ *Create a homework spot that's conducive to study.* Furnish your children with a desk and a

comfortable chair placed in a quiet, well-lit area away from the TV. Purchase a dictionary, atlas and other reference materials needed for their work.

- ▲ *Establish a routine for school nights.* Get your children into the habit of a con-

sistent schedule that includes time for study, play, meals, and bedtime preparation. By having a routine, they'll learn self-discipline and how to plan and structure their time wisely.

- ▲ *Make time to listen.* More than any planning or organizational skills you teach, it's the love and confidence you instill in your children that will help them to succeed. To help them build confidence, listen to their thoughts, feelings, and opinions, and praise them daily. Spend time reading and talking together each night.



SUCCESSFUL SALES

Maximizing Your Sales Potential

Good planning skills and sales techniques go hand in hand. **To maximize your potential for sales this month, plan for the following:**

- ▲ *Wrap up loose ends.* Look over your list of customers who placed orders in the previous month. Double-check to make sure that these orders were fulfilled satisfactorily.
- ▲ *Make appointments.* Call to schedule appointments with customers at the beginning of the month. This will allow you enough time to make the subsequent calls necessary to close a deal for the month.
- ▲ *Schedule client care calls.* Set aside time to call customers and ask if they're satisfied with your product or service. Let them know that their comments are important to you.
- ▲ *Pursue referrals.* Ask clients who are happy with your company to give you a referral.
- ▲ *Look ahead.* Plan time for contacting new prospects and securing new leads.

Generate Sales with 80/20 Principle

Not only is it impossible to focus your complete attention on all of your customers, but the Pareto Principle also teaches that it's not the most efficient or profitable use of your time. When applied to sales, the *Pareto Principle* states that *20 percent of your customers are generating 80 percent of your sales.* Only a few customers buy the bulk of your product or service, while the majority purchase a mere fraction of the total. It stands to reason that savvy salespeople should direct their attention to the 20 percent who buy in greater quantity and frequency.

To incorporate the 80/20 rule into your sales strategy:

- ◆ *Identify your core customers.* Find out who you should be dedicating your time and energy to by tracking which customers are responsible for the most sales. If your client base is extensive, create a profile of the type of person that is most likely to be a substantial buyer.
- ◆ *Direct your efforts toward selling more to your present core customers.* Solicit their input on how they would improve your products or services, and design new ones with this group in mind. Introduce a frequent buyer program that will encourage them to continue buying your products.
- ◆ *Provide first-class customer service.* Aim to surprise your core customers with the quality of service you provide them. Anticipate their needs, and rush to respond to their requests. Although this requires short-term sacrifice, it will yield the long-term benefits of customer loyalty that are essential to business success.



Evaluate Your Weekly Success

To enhance your productivity, conduct a weekly review of your work. **Set aside 20 minutes at the end of each week to:**

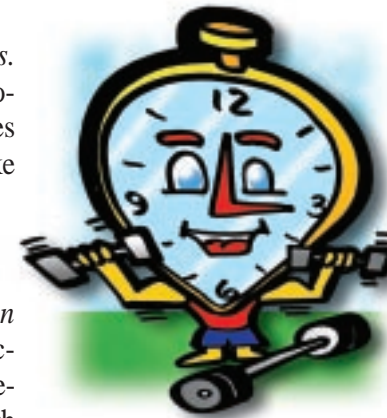
- Examine how successful you were at accomplishing your goals during the past week.
- Identify key time wasters and causes of delay.
- Brainstorm ways to improve routine processes.
- Consider activities to make better use of downtime.
- Plan action steps to implement these ideas next week.

MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Strengthening Your Team

Finding good employees isn't as difficult as keeping them on your staff. Retaining quality employees requires daily attention. **To ensure that your employees remain satisfied:**

- ▲ *Offer salaries and benefits that compete with the other successful organizations in your field.* In addition, provide opportunities for employees to improve their job skills and knowledge base.
- ▲ *Provide excellent care.* Health care plans are an almost standard part of employment in today's world. But beyond this, organizations should strive to provide a clean, healthy, safe, and positive environment in which to work.
- ▲ *Create "family friendly" policies.* Nothing improves employees' morale more than keeping their families happy. Allow your employees to take their families on weekend business trips and devise flexible schedules that accommodate working parents.
- ▲ *Grant recognition for good work often and publicly.* Rather than limiting recognition to monetary rewards, be creative and congratulate employees with new challenges, respect, and certificates or plaques of recognition.
- ▲ *Balance verbal affirmation with regular tangible incentives.* When people can "win" something, competitive spirits soar and gain fresh motivation.
- ▲ *Work at developing company loyalty from day one.* Most employees who leave for other opportunities have been with their current organization for three years or less. Make your organization a place they'll want to invest in.



"Success on any major scale requires you to accept responsibility... In the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have... is the ability to take on responsibility."

– Michael Korda

Making Your Goals a Reality

For a successful enterprise, goal-setting and planning skills are essential. **The following are practical tips for making and implementing a successful plan:**

- ◆ *Establish your objectives.* Assess the condition of the present situation, and from this vantage point, visualize the results you desire. Turn this into specific, measurable goals.
- ◆ *Outline action steps.* List the tasks to be done by order of priority or chronology. Assign deadlines to each task on your list.
- ◆ *Remember resources.* Consider the people, places, supplies, and funding you'll need to carry out your plan.
- ◆ *Make room for the unexpected.* Maintain a flexible attitude when obstacles, crises, and other problems surface.
- ◆ *Communicate your plan to others.* Explain the "how" and "why" behind your plan to the people who will be involved in implementing it.
- ◆ *Review periodically.* Examine progress regularly.

LEADERSHIP

Take Advantage of Trade Shows

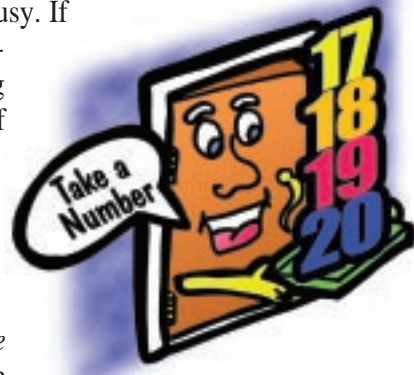
Trade shows can be a potential gold mine for generating new leads. **The following are strategies for maximizing your time at trade shows and conventions:**

- ✓ *Create incentives for visitors.* Encourage people to stay at your booth by displaying free merchandise at the back of the booth. Consider conducting a raffle or asking visitors to sign up for a complimentary product sample.
- ✓ *Converse with purpose.* Prepare a one or two sentence description of what your company does and what distinguishes it from the other companies at the show. Look for ways to include this in your few moments of conversation with potential prospects.
- ✓ *Take notes.* Write down key points and information as you talk with people. As soon as you return from the show, follow up with a letter or E-mail that mentions the items you discussed together.

Dealing with Drop-In Visitors

Being accessible to the people you work with is one thing, but having your day constantly interrupted by visitors is quite another. To know the difference is the fine line of managing interruptions. Without a strategy for dealing with these situations, you'll be at the mercy of whoever appears at your door. **Instead, handle drop-in visitors successfully by practicing the following approach:**

- *Schedule time for routine visits.* Let your coworkers know the times of day that they can drop in to talk. Ask them to keep a list of the things they need to talk to you about and to wait to discuss these items all at one time.
- *Discourage excessive socializing.* Keep your office door closed when you're busy. If you work in an open work environment, position your desk facing away from people if possible. If someone pops in unannounced, stand up to greet him or her, and remain standing while you talk. This nonverbal cue will indicate that you don't plan to talk long.
- *Speak up when you don't have time to talk.* Kindly and clearly tell people that you're in the middle of something and will get back to them as soon as possible. Give a time frame in which they can expect to hear from you, and offer to meet in their office when you're ready.
- *Allow interruptions when appropriate.* If the matter is high priority or can be resolved in five minutes or less, handle it on the spot. Offer to help, but specify the exact amount of time you have available. For example, you might say, "Sure, I can do that, but I have an important phone call to make in 10 minutes. Can we finish in time?"
- *Redirect.* For the majority of interruptions, delegate the item to someone else. Have your assistant follow up on it, suggest other coworkers or colleagues to refer to, or point out how the person can solve the problem on his or her own. If you're the only one qualified to address the problem, schedule a time to discuss it later.

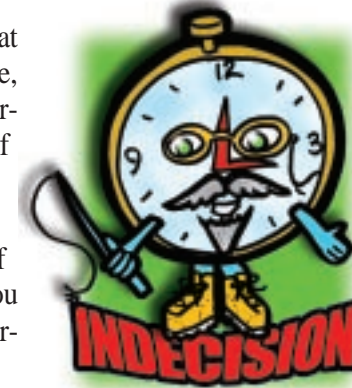


PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Making Decisions Productively

Indecision can be a colossal time waster. In fact, it's the cause of many cases of procrastination. Often, the longer you put a decision off, the more frustrated and less productive you become. **Here are some tips for conquering indecision:**

- ◆ *Seek sufficient information.* Find out what you can in the time you have available, and think through this information thoroughly. Evaluate the pros and cons of each choice.
- ◆ *Confront worry.* If you're anxious over what might go wrong, make a list of possible problems and solutions. You can then do something about your worries by making a plan for them.
- ◆ *Pinpoint perfectionism.* Realize that no one will make the right decision all of the time, and consider whether there really is a "right" or "wrong" involved. Simply do what you can to make a good decision.
- ◆ *Focus on your priorities.* If the decision is over something minor, don't give it too much of your time. It isn't worth time or mental energy fretting about it.
- ◆ *Know when it's time to act.* At some point, waiting for further information won't improve your decision much. You can usually make an educated choice without having to know everything.
- ◆ *Move on.* After you decide what to do, be confident in your decision and take action. Avoid the tendency to rehash your decision.



Pat Answers

Dear Pat: I've recently been promoted to manager. I'm excited about the opportunity, but now I supervise people who used to be coworkers. The problem is that one of my new "subordinates" is also a friend. How can I keep my friend without compromising my new role?

Pat Answers: Balancing social and work relationships is always challenging. By continuing to have a close personal relationship with your employee, you run several risks. The most obvious is the perception that you're giving preferential treatment to your "friend." In addition to the risk of misperception, there's also the risk that you may actually treat him better without realizing it. It's hard for most people to separate their actions from their emotions. When a manager likes and trusts someone, that person can seem like the logical choice for important assignments, even though it might be a better management decision to pick someone else. Another risk is that you may be reluctant to discipline your employee/friend. I'm not saying it's impossible to be friends with a subordinate, but it *can* be very difficult.

My advice is to tell him that until the two of you are more firmly established in your new work roles, you need to limit your social interactions to things that involve the entire group. If he's your friend, he'll understand. *Welcome to the bittersweet world of management!*



Questions and answers are excerpted from columns provided to Pat Answers subscribers. Pat Grigadean is a professional mediator, trainer, and employee-relations specialist. She

writes Pat Answers in consultation with Haven Street-Allen, SPHR. To include this interactive column in your internal publication, visit www.patgrigadean.com. © 2004 Pat Grigadean.

Staying Organized: It's All in Your Attitude

Staying organized is primarily a matter of attitude. **The following are false excuses people have for not being organized:** • "I have more important things to be working on." • "It may look messy, but I know exactly where everything is." • "If I tried to organize things, it wouldn't make much difference." • "People would think that I have too much time on my hands." • "It would just get messy again anyway, so why bother?"

TIMESAVERS

Are You Losing Time?

It's the little things that add up. And when it comes to doing things around the house, nonessential tasks may be robbing you of precious time that could be better spent with your family. **Here are simple ways you can protect your time:**

- ✓ Use an answering machine or caller ID box to screen your telephone calls.
- ✓ Limit television watching to a few worthwhile programs each week.
- ✓ Keep a running list of the items you need from the store.
- ✓ Do several errands on the same trip to town.
- ✓ Shop around for items by calling on the phone first.
- ✓ Choose clothes, furniture, and appliances that require minimal maintenance.
- ✓ Relax your standard for housecleaning and yard upkeep.
- ✓ Double recipes and freeze half for another meal.
- ✓ Exercise while you spend time with a loved one.

Use Caution with Shortcuts

Shortcuts may be speedy in the short term, but they can be real time traps in the long run. Taking time to do your work right now can save you countless hours and costly errors later.

To do the job right the first time:

- *Know the difference between right and perfect.* Many people believe that they should do something right if it's to be done at all. The problem with this is that they think "right" means *perfect*, and so they continue to put off doing the job. Instead, aim to limit errors within acceptable standards.
- *Check grammar, spelling, and word usage.* When writing a document, use the computer's spellchecker to look for errors, but never rely solely on it. Make sure the definitions of words match the intended meanings and consult a stylebook for proper punctuation and style guidelines.
- *Verify names and numbers.* Do your homework before writing a report or giving a presentation. Be sure you have the correct dates for historical references. When mentioning a particular athlete, musician, court case, or other fact, confirm it with someone who's knowledgeable in that field.
- *Look over your work more than once.* Try reading sentences backward to catch errors that your mind may skip and see as correct. Give yourself a break before your final proof, so you can look at it with a fresh eye.
- *Ask a qualified person to review your work.* Since people tend to become less alert the longer they read, have one person begin proofing at the beginning of the document and ask the other to start from the end.
- *Concentrate on one thing at a time.* Give the task your complete attention and make an effort to do your best within the time available. Then, move on to your next task and don't look back. Avoid worrying about whether you did things right, knowing that you gave it your best.



PERSONAL GROWTH

Enhance Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking skills are a necessary component to many business situations. **The following are methods for applying critical thinking skills when faced with a special situation:**

- *Focus your efforts.* To get the right answers, you must ask the right questions. List the key questions necessary for examining the situation and define the important terms and issues involved.
- *Cross-examine the information presented.* Identify the facts and examples that corroborate the position stated. Solicit additional information and explanation for the points you don't understand.
- *Use logic.* Consider whether the hypotheses were tested properly and whether the conclusions made follow a sound thought process. Apply deductive or inductive thinking to the situation. **Deductive reasoning** – using a general principle to make a specific conclusion. **Inductive reasoning** – taking the specific details of a situation to make a general conclusion.
- *Break down arguments into their components.* Distinguish the reasoning structure of the argument, and pinpoint any irrelevant points made. Analyze the assumptions and associations used.
- *Investigate the sources.* Determine the credentials, reputation, and reliability of the sources used.
- *Evaluate.* Consider the significance of the findings presented as well as viable alternatives. Decide whether you agree or disagree with the conclusions made.



Update Your Address Book

Do you fumble around trying to find phone numbers that you wrote down somewhere? Relying on your computer can save you those fretful minutes spent searching for scraps of paper. **Try using your computer to organize the following types of information:** • Schedules and appointments • Personal and business addresses • E-mail addresses • Phone numbers • Notes • Recipes • Budgets • Lists

Accomplishing Tasks on Time

To accomplish your projects and goals on time:

- ◆ *Break the project down into smaller steps.* Calculate how much time each of these steps will reasonably take to complete.
- ◆ *Schedule in reverse order.* Starting from the deadline date, work backward using the time each step will require to figure out the date at which to start.
- ◆ *Set interim due dates.* Use your estimated times to make deadlines for each step and allow ample time for steps with variables that may be in question.
- ◆ *Factor in the unexpected.* For each step in the project, add an extra 10 percent of time for dealing with changes and setbacks, as well as an additional 10 percent of time for the project overall.
- ◆ *Stick to it.* Stay focused on meeting your deadlines without allowing yourself to make excuses. If you're cutting things too close, revise your plan to give yourself more time.

PERSONAL TIME

Carry Time Skills Home with You

When deciding whether or not to continue a subscription, **consider the following:**

- ◆ How long does it take before you get around to reading this publication? Is the content outdated by the time you do?
- ◆ Does the publication provide the greatest value in content for the amount of time spent reading? Is there one publication that could replace the need for several similar ones?
- ◆ Is there a more efficient way to obtain the same quality of information? What forums, collegial networks, or online services are comparable?
- ◆ Is the publication worth the money spent on it? Would you be willing to pay for it if your company didn't?
- ◆ Do you find yourself referring back to it on occasion? Or, does it merely take up space that could be better used?
- ◆ What would happen if you stopped reading this publication? Would there be any negative consequences?

Spending Time in Reflection

If you're not careful, the noise of the outside world can quickly drown out the thoughts in your inner world. Making time to be quiet is an important part of rejuvenation, self-discovery, and growth. **To include moments of quiet reflection in your day:**

- ✦ *Make a quiet spot in your home.* Choose a room or private nook where people can go to relax undisturbed. Place a cozy chair in the room and leave some thought-provoking books nearby.
- ✦ *Schedule daily time to be alone.* Find at least a half-hour slot in your day for being alone with your thoughts. Try doing so first thing in the morning, after dinner, or before bedtime.
- ✦ *Keep a journal.* Jot down what you think, feel, learn, and experience each day. Or, use your journal for stories, poems, songs, or drawings that express your musings.
- ✦ *Limit your contact with the outside world.* Turn off your beeper, cell phone, computer, and telephone temporarily. Allow yourself time to take a break from having to instantly respond to everyone.
- ✦ *Leave your car radio off.* If you have little time by yourself besides your daily commute, make the most of it. Enjoy the peaceful silence of driving with your own thoughts.
- ✦ *Go to the library.* Choose a good book and go to a reading room where talking isn't allowed. Or, simply sit there with your eyes closed and listen to yourself breathe in and out.
- ✦ *Take a stroll.* Visit the park on your lunch break or take a meandering stroll after dinner. Tune in to the sights, sounds, and smells of nature that you're normally too busy to notice.

"A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds."

– Francis Bacon



PERSONAL SUCCESS

Increase Your Knowledge Bank

Knowing how to learn and recall information quickly and accurately can be of considerable advantage in managing your time well. Learning experts agree that a person's retention can be greatly enhanced by applying various learning methods when studying something new. **The following are techniques to help you learn and retain material more quickly:**

- ◆ *Prepare your mind with visualization.* In your mind's eye, see yourself studying the material. Picture concentrating intently and understanding it. Then, follow through on these images by actually doing it.
- ◆ *Break it down.* Examine how the material is organized before digging into the details. Read a summary of the book on the jacket or in the introduction and look over the table of contents and subject headings.
- ◆ *Use repetition.* Writing the information down over and over again is one time-tested method for memorization. You can write on paper, a chalkboard, or with a computer or word processor.
- ◆ *Review what you've learned with flashcards.* Carry cards with you to study while you wait somewhere. Replace them with new ones as you master them.
- ◆ *Involve your senses.* Experience the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of the subject you're learning about. The more senses you incorporate, the easier it will be to trigger your memory.
- ◆ *Listen to music.* Many people find that music helps them to concentrate while they study. Some research even suggests that music may stimulate important neural pathways in the brain involved in cognition.
- ◆ *Sleep on it.* Before you fall asleep each night, review the important points you learned or had problems understanding. You may find that you'll have fresh insights on the material when you wake up.



Be Prepared for Success

Keeping your desk well-stocked and organized can save you countless minutes spent scrambling and searching for what you need. **To keep your desk equipped to facilitate efficient work:**

- ◆ *Leave a pen and notepad by the phone.* By keeping all your messages in one place, you'll know exactly where to look for them.
- ◆ *Store writing utensils in one convenient location.* Try placing them in a transparent container on top of your desk.
- ◆ *Discard any supply that's no longer usable.* Avoid getting into the habit of putting dried-up pens or bottles of correction fluid back into your desk.
- ◆ *Post a calendar next to your phone.* When scheduling or changing appointments on the phone, you can refer to it quickly.
- ◆ *Purchase stamps by the roll.* Buy more stamps before you run out by ordering by mail or online at www.usps.gov.

How Is Your Track Record... for Credibility?

When gamblers go to the race track, they consider the prior winners when placing their bets. When investors buy stocks, they look at the past performance of the mutual fund or the corporation. When voters go to the polls, they consider the voting record of the candidate before casting their ballot for or against. Hunches and name recognition do play a part in all of these situations, but over the long haul, performance profoundly affects people's decisions about whom they believe. The same is true in leading, learning, and loving – credibility counts!

Here are several suggestions on how you can improve your track record for credibility:

- *Search for commonalities.* People usually like people who are like them. And people believe and trust people they like. Try to discover attitudes, likes, dislikes, family backgrounds, experiences, personality virtues or quirks, careers, goals, or values that you have in common with others. Then, emphasize those commonalities when you communicate with them.
- *Show concern and compassion.* People tend to trust people who show concern for them. Even companies have to show concern over self-interest in times of crisis. The same is true on an individual level. People have to feel your concern before they hear your words.
- *Demonstrate cooperation and good intentions.* To be credible, you must demonstrate that you're acting in good faith to the best of your knowledge and ability. People must believe that you want to cooperate to help them achieve their personal and career goals. People will

forgive you for poor judgment, but rarely for poor intentions.



- *Be consistent.* Communication happens through actions as well as words. People communicate by what they say and what they don't say; by which policies they enforce and which

policies they don't enforce; by what they allow work time for and what they don't allow work time for; by what they fund and what they don't fund; by behaviors they reward and behaviors they punish; by what they do and what they criticize others for doing; by what they ask for and what they're willing to give in return. To be credible, people's words have to match their policies, performance, and plans.

- *Demonstrate competence.* People flock to experts, star performers, wise decision makers, and winners. People don't intentionally invest their money in poorly performing stock; neither do they want to invest trust in people they doubt can achieve what they claim. To be led, either by words or actions, followers need to have faith in your competence to perform. They want to know you can win the game. They want to know you can finish the project successfully. They want to know you can turn the company around.
- *Be correct.* Few people set out to be incorrect; it's just that when they have missing informa-

tion, they make assumptions or reason wrongly. Instead of informing, they misinform unintentionally. Whether or not people routinely ask for the source of your information or conclusions, be ready to provide it. If they ask for sources, rather than be offended, welcome such testing questions as credibility checkers.

- *Admit what you don't know.* People push when they smell bluff and gruff. It's a simple principle – easy to remember and accomplish – but difficult for some people to swallow: Nothing makes people believe what you do know like admitting what you don't know.
- *Be complete.* Are you telling all you know? Recognize the difference between lies, half-truths, omissions, and cover-ups. True, but incomplete, statements can lead to false conclusions. Literal truth, when offered without complete explanations, can lead to literal lies. Knowing smiles accompanied by long silences can elicit wrong conclusions. Lying happens in numerous ways. Intentions stand center stage here. Ultimately, questionable intentions cast doubt about character.
- *Be current.* Give up outdated data, opinions, and stereotypes. With information overload, data more than two or three years old can't support your decisions. Correct, but outdated, statistics soon become outdated. Recollect.
- *Avoid exaggeration.* Was the score 50 to zip or 30 to 10? Did you have to wait half an hour or half a minute? Did the caller slam down the phone or hesitate to talk? Did the supplier raise the price on your raw materials 10 percent or 2 percent? Exaggeration makes great humor but destroys credibility.

- *Evaluate criticisms and objections.* If you reject or refute criticisms and objections out of hand, without hearing them out and giving yourself time to consider them fully, you lose credibility. People identify you as a reactor rather than a reflective, credible thinker. The more thorough your consideration of contradictory information the more credible your final opinion or decision.
- *Keep confidences.* When people know you share personal, confidential matters about others with them, they'll fear you'll do the same thing where they're concerned. Keeping confidences when "nobody would know you told" speaks volumes about character. Those who observe your discretion in deciding to keep quiet about hurtful or personal information involving others bridge to other favorable conclusions about your credibility in times of stress.
- *Be sincere and genuine.* Sincerity is easy to fake and hard to make. That is, people who pretend to be sincere can pitch an earnest plea, look at you with pleading eyes and a straight face, and promise plums that dance in your head. But genuineness comes from character and is therefore harder to make. You either are or you aren't. What you experience is what you share. What you value is what you give. What you say is what you believe.



By Dianna Booher, author, speaker and CEO of Booher Consultants, a Dallas-based communications training firm. Her programs include communication and life balance/productivity. She has published 40 books, including *From Contact to Contract and Speak with Confidence: Powerful Presentations that Inform, Inspire and Persuade*. Call (817) 868-1200 or visit www.booher.com.