Introduction

I have hesitated to publish this article for quite some time. The simple reason is that I was still learning how to be more reliable. If I were to be completely honest (and I will be) I would have to admit that reliability was never my strong suit. In fact, I have a history of being unreliable. While I may have had
the purest of intention in my willingness to help others, I often found myself in situations where I would give someone my word that I would help them with a particular thing by X date only to for the date to come and pass before I realise that I have not delivered. In the worst cases, persons had to call or email me reminding me that “I had promised to ….” Maybe you have been in a similar situation.

This situation plagued my consciousness for the longest while. Therefore, I decided to embark on a journey to find out what I could do improve my reliability. This article will summarise what I learnt in that search, giving due credit to the sources of the ideas and strategies I have found to be most effective.

1. Use an Agenda, Calendar or Reminder

Even when I was in a Junior position at my first job, I had a lot of people counting on me. We all currently have family members, friends and colleagues that are depending on us to follow through on our promises. With so many people depending on us, how can we keep all their request in our field of vision and ensure that we deliver on time? One of the strategies I found most practical was to keep an agenda or calendar handy and to add tasks to it as they come up.

As an example, when Sally asks me to loan her my copy of “The Richest Man in Babylon”, instead of promptly replying “No problem, I'll bring it tomorrow,” as I typically do, I instead bring up the Calendar App on my phone and create a reminder for 07:00 PM that evening. The text of the reminder might simply read, “Put The Richest Man in Babylon in my bag for Sally.” The app will send me a reminder when I get home that evening and I will immediately put the book in my bag. I may or may not create another reminder for 09:00 am the following morning with the simple text “Deliver The Richest Man in Babylon to Sally”. This is a very convenient way for me to improve my reliability with Sally and whomever else might ask me to assist them in a simple task. Some persons might still need a physical agenda or calendar to implement this strategy but it will certainly improve your reliability if adhered to.

2. Keep A Running List

How many times has someone, in casual conversation, said “Oh could you just do X or Y when you get the chance?” Do you give the typical “Sure” response (As I often do!) then forget five minutes later? We might forget but I can guarantee you the person making the request hasn't. I have found that it gives a negative impression when, after an hour, the person returns and asks if we got around to that thing only to hear that we didn't. If we allow this to happen frequently enough, that person subconsciously labels us as unreliable.

The quick, and effective fix I have found for this comes from a course on Office Etiquette I did on

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Lynda.com. The course recommended that we keep a running list of tasks. In this way, we are able to keep abreast of all the casual request that others make of us in passing. We then have to follow through on the task if we are truly to improve our reliability. These days when Daren and I finish a conversation and he asks if I could send him something afterwards, I ask him for a minute and make a note of his request on my running list either in my task book or on my phone. I do this thought I am tempted to issue the “Sure” autoresponse.

3. Do It Now

It is often those little tasks, call me later, send me an email, remind me to do X, that ultimately convict us of unreliability. Possibly, the most effective strategy that can defend us at such a trial was shared by Mr. Brian Tracy in one of his videos on productivity. Those three words, “Do It Now”, are all I can remember from the talk. I have even forgotten the title of the video. I think this concept of doing it now is extremely powerful.

Imagine what message it would send if the next time your Supervisor (or a Client) asked us to send them an email with additional information we did so immediately. Imagine what they would say about us, if they got a notification that the email they just requested came in, before they hung up the phone. Doing it now has other advantages as discussed by Brian, Daren Hardy and the late Chet Holmes. It makes us more productive. Being more productive and knowing people consider us highly reliable makes us feel great about ourselves.

4. Protect Your Yeses

I will be the first to admit that I have a problem saying no. I am a “Yes Man”. My default answer to almost any request is an emphatic “Yes”. I believe I first heard the concept of protecting your yeses from Patrick Bet-David, the host of Valuetainment. I will only add to this concept the fact that we need to employ caution in using this strategy. We do not want to be in the unfavourable position of telling a Supervisor, or worse, a Client, that we can’t do something they know is quite possible.

Effectively, it comes down to priorities. We have to be careful of those little odd tasks that we commit to. We have to be mindful of those things we already have to do and our realistic ability to fill the requests that are being made of us. Remember, often times it is the little things that trip us up. (Highlight this to tweet it). In the grand scheme of things, it is better that retain our reliability than to attempt to be Superman for everybody.

5. Overestimate. (Modestly)

In business, and particularly the service industry, one of the greatest strengths a company can have is that of surpassing expectations. It is known as under-promising and over-delivering. I picked up this strategy from a Mentor. He is notorious for over-delivering on his promises and is one of the most
reliable persons I know. He taught me the value of modestly overestimating the time it will take to complete a given task or project. This has afforded him an impeccable record of reliability. We can adopt this principle regardless of which business we work in.

Subsequently, I have gone on to apply this strategy even in sending my emails. So instead of telling the client that I will email them in an hour, I tell them to expect an email by the end of the following day. (Then I start working on the email the moment they hang up.) By the way, writing emails is no trivial matter, more on this in a subsequent article. One might refute this strategy as crafty and dishonest. Not so, I would rebut with the fact that any unforeseen situation may easily deter us from completing the task in the “optimistic” time. We could quite easily get an urgent call, be pulled into an impromptu meeting or have to leave our desk for an extended time. A modest overestimation of the time it will take to complete a given task may very well be the most professional thing to do.

**Conclusion**

When someone says we are unreliable, they are actually saying that we can't be counted on. They are saying our word is of no worth, that we are full of hot air. Not having a high level of reliability may very well mean that we will be overlooked for the next big promotion. It means they won't be giving us any referrals. However, we can change this. Even if we are not currently hailed for our reliability, we can begin to change it by implementing these five strategies.

Here again are the five most practical strategies I found for increasing ones reliability.

- Using an agenda, calendar or reminder.
- Keeping a running list
- Doing it now
- Protecting our yeses
- Modestly overestimating

**Endorsement**

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