



Helping leaders and organizations live up to their promise

How Far Will You Go?

How far will you go to keep a promise - to deliver a product, meet a deadline or live up to your brand? We could all learn from Val's Cleaners in my South Minneapolis neighborhood, which last week delivered a memorable demonstration of delivering as promised: The day before a business trip I dropped off a same-day item; I was leaving at 5:00 the next morning and they assured me it would be ready that afternoon. It wasn't ready when promised - no big deal, and I began chalking it up as one more run-of-the-mill disappointing customer service experience. What was a big deal was Val the owner calling me later in the day asking if he could deliver the completed order to my home - which he did! Needless to say, Val secured my customer loyalty for some time to come; it would take a lot for me to even begin looking for another cleaner.

We live in a world of promises - promises made, promises kept and promises broken. Some promises are explicit: to re-pay a loan as promised, deliver a report as we agreed to or meet someone at the designated time. Some are more implicit: fast and courteous service from a fast-food franchise, transportation carriers' published schedules, a law enforcement agency's pledge "to protect and serve," doctors "doing no harm" and banks keeping our money safe, for example. An organization's mission statement is a kind of promise, as are its posted values. A strong brand is largely a product of consistently fulfilling the brand's promise. The degree that we keep these promises - large and small - affects our credibility, perceived trustworthiness, the quality of our relationships and our bottom line. Here are some practices that will pay dividends:

- Make sure we can answer the question: "What are we promising?" Written or not, clearly one of Val's Cleaner's promises is "what you ordered when you ordered it."
- Under-promise and over-deliver.
- Hold ourselves and others in our organization or team accountable. I admire the practice of a client CEO who at the conclusion of each day reviewed what promises he had made and which he was fulfilling.
- Check for alignment around our promises: Does everyone know and agree on what we are promising? Do policies and practices reinforce delivering on what we've promised? Are rewards and incentives aligned with fulfilling our promises?
- Ask for feedback. What do our customers expect, and are their expectations being met or exceeded?

It's a competitive world, and especially so these days. None of us can afford to be sloppy about the

promises we make or how we honor those promises. I'd love to hear back from you and your stories about living up to our promise and delivering on our promises.

"The key to growth is to learn to make promises and to keep them."
Stephen R. Covey

"When you get right down to the root meaning of the word 'succeed,' you find that it simply means to follow through."
F. W. Nichol

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