

### **Making a Mess Of What You Profess**

If you are like most managers or executives you've thought about the fact that you need to "practice what you preach" or "walk the talk." What you may not have considered are the real impacts and the problems caused when you or your managers don't walk the talk or when you don't follow up on things you've professed to be important.

Failing to practice what you profess by way of values, ethics or even adherence to simple procedural guidelines does more damage than simply allowing you to be labeled as a hypocrite. It actually serves as high impact training that you don't mean what you say.

One of our clients decided he'd finally had enough problems with lost or damaged equipment. So he called all of his crews and supervisors together and read them the riot act. From here on out there would be "a place for everything and everything in its place," in addition, he advised, every piece of equipment needing repair would be flagged and referred to the company engineer to be made ready for the next project.. He checked twice to make sure everybody understood the new policy and then sent them back to work.

The next week was a particularly busy one for his company. Last minute sales were good and his crews were on the road for at least eight hours every day. When he walked by the loading dock on Friday afternoon there were tools, materials and some damaged equipment sitting along the walls. Two crew members, unloading more equipment noticed the boss and held their breath. He stopped briefly, appeared to note the problem and was then called back into the office to take an important phone call. He, nor his supervisors, ever mentioned what they'd seen to the crews.

What damage was done? Well, beyond the fact that there was a mad scramble to find equipment for a Monday morning project; our client suffered damage to his ability to lead. In a world where actions speak louder than words, he'd just trained his crew to understand that the boss doesn't always mean what he says; putting away tools and equipment was not really very important after all, an order isn't really an order and a policy is an impractical idea.

What can you do to avoid the mistakes our client made?

1. Keep trying to practice what you preach. Most of us do so in good faith. It's the little things we don't notice about ourselves that cause problems.
2. Don't issue directives, guidelines, procedures or policies unless you are fully prepared to enforce them. Being too busy with other things can't be an excuse. More damage is done by issuing the "standard" and failing to follow-up than by holding back on implementation or adoption of the standard until you and your managers are ready and have the resources to follow-up consistently and effectively.

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