

One Trait That Can Make Or Break Your Reputation In Business

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We all have a list of traits that bother us in a person, particularly in the people we do business with. Your list may be long, short, consistent, or ever-changing, but there is one quality that tends to make the cut across the board – lateness. I did a poll of 150 of my business associates, and more than 80% listed lateness as one of their top three greatest annoyances in those that they work with. In the business arena (and every other, for that matter), a lack of punctuality is not something to be overlooked. Yes, there are those rare unavoidable moments in life where your car breaks down or your plane is delayed, but the truth is that those instances are extremely rare. Generally when an associate is late it is due to their own poor planning, or worse, selfishness and lack of caring. These are the real reasons not to take tardiness lightly. If you work with a person that is chronically late, your warning signs should be going off. If you're that late person, your warning signs should be exploding.

In theory, it should be getting easier to be punctual nowadays with all of our technological advances. After all, your calendar is synced to all 5 of your devices, and Siri is setting reminders and alarms instantaneously. GPS can predict exactly when you will arrive at your destination. Most people are even hooked up to the same world clock on their iPhone which means even our minute hands are ticking at the same time. We are in a constant state of tech overload. There are zillions of apps to help our punctuality, preparedness, and productivity. However, technology appears to be the demise of timeliness. It's too easy to text your client that you will be five minutes late because of "parking." E-mail allows you to push back a meeting 15 minutes before it starts. Technology isn't preventing our tardiness, it's feeding it. It's making it more acceptable. The fix? Get back in touch with your internal clock. Hold yourself, not your iPad, accountable. After all, people were doing business (and promptly) before there were screens pre-attached to their eyeballs.

For those of you that read my articles regularly, I am going to sound like a broken record as I mention Dale Carnegie once again. His book is full of straightforward, common sense tips for success. However, sometimes it seems common sense isn't so common. In his famous book of the same title, Carnegie advises, "if you want to win friends and influence people, be prompt." Punctuality directly correlates with the amount of respect a person has for another and for their time. When you are late, you are telling your colleague that your time is more valuable than theirs, whether you intend to or not. Yes, we've all heard and used the *I'm-sorry-I'm-extremely-busy-today* excuse. However, this is hardly an excuse. Your day may be packed, but your colleague's is too. With every extra minute they wait for you, you are foiling their plans for the rest of the day. Conversely, punctuality shows that you are mindful of the other party's schedule and that their time is important to you. It shows that you are not only thinking about yourself, but considering the other person, as well.

Research shows that punctuality is not only a sign of respect, it is a sign of trustworthiness. If you can be counted on to be where you say you will be, when you say you will be there, it shows that you can be trusted with other tasks and responsibilities. In fact, studies show that people that are not punctual tend to underestimate how long things will take, procrastinate, and are more easily distracted than others. Why would your boss entrust a top priority project to a guy that slinks into the 9 a.m. meeting at 9:12 with a Starbucks in hand? He can't even be in his seat on time, let alone meet a deadline. Be the person with notebook and pencil out at 8:57. Or perhaps more accurately, be the person with iPad mini and Notes app open at 8:57.

Punctuality is key when it comes to branding yourself as a hard-working, trustworthy, capable business associate. After all, some of the most successful people in history were extremely punctual and demanded the same timeliness from those around them – Steve Jobs, Gandhi, and George Washington to name a few. Jobs started meetings on the dot. Gandhi was inseparable from his watch. When a member of Congress was late to dinner with the first president, Washington famously quipped, "we are punctual here. My cook never asks whether the company has arrived, but whether the hour has come." Don't risk your reputation by being even five minutes late. Give yourself an extra 15 minutes in case of traffic. Wake up 10 minutes early. Keep your business materials organized and easily accessible. Make punctuality a priority in your life. You'll thank yourself later.