

Your Reputation - A Dozen Ways to Protect It

by Robert Whipple MBA, CPLP

Few things in life are as important as your reputation. What people think and say about you when you are not present has everything to do with your level of happiness and success in this world. I think everyone knows this intuitively, yet many of us sometimes behave as if we are not cognizant of that aspect of life.

We can all improve our lot in life if we remain alert to how other people interpret our words and actions. For example, if you are known as the person who is fun to be with and work with, you will have many more opportunities in life than if your reputation is one of a cantankerous individual who is difficult to please and a general pain to be around. If the impact of one's reputation on the quality of life is so well understood, why is it so easy to get caught up in the moment and do or say things we regret later?

I believe we just forget that there are no time outs in life, and the camera is rolling every minute. That leaves us vulnerable to lapses which are hard to erase later. A damaged reputation takes 3-4 times as much energy to repair than a good one takes to maintain.

Here are some simple ideas that can help preserve your precious reputation. All of these are common sense, but unfortunately for some people they are not common practice. It is wise to remind ourselves of these simple, but profound, rules daily.

1. **Follow the Golden Rule.** We all learned this simple rule in our youth. I believe it is one of the most tangible ways to demonstrate Emotional Intelligence. There is a flaw in the Golden Rule if you take it literally in every situation because some people may not appreciate being treated as I would like to be treated. I think this is a small point. Someone invented a corollary to the Golden Rule called the Platinum Rule which is, "Treat other people as *they* would like to be treated." I have a bigger problem with the Platinum Rule than the Golden Rule because treating people like they would like to be treated in a business environment would mean giving out huge raises, lots of additional vacation, not very much work, and in general be detrimental to the organization. Sticking with the intent of the Golden rule is really just treating people the right way.

2. Be positive. To keep a good reputation, try to have your ratio of positive to negative remarks be as high as possible. You may not even realize when you are coming across as a negative person because the words you use to frame conversation are coming from your own paradigm, so they appear to you as affirmative statements. It is a good idea to test how you are coming across by either listening to yourself on a audio tape or reading some of your own e-mails to identify if you are habitually coming across as a positive or negative person. Believe it or not, it is hard to tell if you have not specifically checked this out. Reason: people with low Emotional Intelligence are the ones with the biggest blind spots.

3. Always do more than your share. It is curious that in most relationships both individuals believe they are constantly going more than half way toward making the relationship be successful. Yet the truth is, it is impossible for both people to consistently give more than their fair share. If you have a reputation for being generous with your time, talent, advice, caring, money, and other resources, people will gravitate toward you instinctively. You will have a reputation of a caring doer rather than a selfish slacker.

4. Admit mistakes. It is impossible to go through life without making numerous mistakes. If you are smart enough to readily admit when you have done something wrong or stupid, you will draw others to you because of your genuine nature. If you are duplicitous and try to duck any shortcomings, you will have the reputation of being phony or just plain dishonest.

5. Be kind. Individuals who have empathy for others gain a reputation for kindness that pays off in reciprocal kindness they receive from others. People do favors for other people they like.

6. Listen more than you speak. If you have the ability to hold your own tongue and sincerely appreciate the input of others, they will share many valuable ideas with you. But if you are always first to talk or a person who is constantly stating opinions as if they are hard facts, people are going to instinctively turn you off. Don't be a bore.

7. Be humble. Nobody likes a perpetual braggart. Remember that your opinion of yourself is transparent to other people. If you put yourself on a higher pedestal than everyone else, you will have a tough time making and keeping friends in this world.

8. Be reliable. Build a track record of doing what you say you're going to do. When you follow through with intentions precisely, you gain the stature of one who can be counted upon when things really matter. When circumstances prevent you from meeting commitments, immediately inform the other person of the delay and the new estimated due date.

9. Learn to read body language. The majority of input about how others see us does not come from the words they use when talking with us. It is the tone of voice and body language that are the telltale signs of how that person views us. It is imperative to understand the subtle facial and body position movements that allow you to read the situation and modify your behaviors if you are on thin ice.

10. Offer and ask for assistance often. By showing a willingness to help other people and also a willingness to take advice from others about yourself, you build a collegial relationship with them. By helping others, we are really helping ourselves to a great extent.

11. Operate from a sense of values. Know your own spiritual sense of what is right and follow that beacon in everything you do. It really helps if you have a set of written values for yourself. You can share these with other people, and it will let them know you operate from a solid footing in life.

12. Keep your ear to the ground. Keep attuned for evidence of how other people are viewing you. This means being alert to the subtle cues and learning to read between the lines. If you suspect there is some dirt being spread about you that is unflattering to your reputation, it is up to you to take responsible action to protect that precious element of your life.

These twelve things when applied daily in your dealings with others can go a long way to preserving your reputation. There are numerous other things we could add to this list. The point is that your reputation governs how successful and happy you are in the professional world. Guard it carefully using the ideas listed above.

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