

HOW TO MAKE AGREEMENTS THAT STICK

Whether you want to close a sale or clinch any other type of deal, self-awareness might make the difference between success and failure

By Kurt Larsson

Many people have ideas about what agreement is, but very few of them seem to agree.

How often have you heard or said the following words “but I thought we had an agreement?!” If you were forced to utter that phrase with regards to an agreement, chances are what you had was anything but...

What do you mean when you say “I agree”? According to *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, the word “agree” comes from the Latin *ad* meaning “to” and *gratum* meaning “pleasing” or “to please”. A lot of agreements seem to fit just that mould. This definition seems to focus on saying something in order to please the listener. Note, though, that it speaks nothing about carrying out what was agreed.

Is your intention to satisfy or be polite? When you make an agreement, is it your intention fully carry it out and satisfy the other party, or is just it to be polite and try?

Can we at least agree that we won’t know until the task is either carried out or not? We maybe able to shed some light on this “be polite” or “satisfy” thing by taking a closer look at our body language.

Simple Test

Please test the following on yourself. Check your breathing when you clinch an agreement. When you agree to satisfy, verify whether you are exhaling. In other words, are you breathing out when you utter that famous line, “I agree”?

On the other hand, check whether you are inhaling, sometimes very nervously and quickly, whenever you agree to be “polite”.

“Satisfy” implies being whole or complete. Body workers testify that the best healing takes place in you body when breathing out. This becomes interesting in the context of agreeing in order to satisfy, since “healing” literally means “to make whole” - to produce a state where nothing is missing but everything is complete.

Think of the stillness of a pond at dusk. What if we could train ourselves to make agreements with that same quality? What could agreeing like that do to our ability to relate?

Fulfilled agreements, of course, are the cornerstones of trust and sound relationships.

One Step Closer...

In any sales process or cycle, there are building blocks that take you methodically from one step to the next. With each step you also increase the probability that you will sell something. It means that you and the buyer are one step closer to trading something with equal value. It also means you have at least minimized the risk of being betrayed and hopefully can even trust each other a bit more.

As much as we have tested it, a balanced agreement seems to be the focal point of moving from one step to the next. According to what we have found so far there seems to be a link between the number of agreements you and your prospect have identified and the trust you have created.

With each "yes", nod of the head and/or handshake, the probability that you will eventually sell something increases.

More agreements mean more room to dance. When we say "agreements", we are not just talking about the *big* ones, we mean each one that moves you forward in the cycle or creates more trust in your relationship. It could be as simple as agreeing on how much time your meeting is going to take or that it is sunny outside.

It may be easier to picture agreements as individual bricks, bricks in a dance floor. The more bricks you have placed in your floor, the more room you have to dance with your partner. Doesn't this resemble a sales process?

The more agreements you have with your potential clients the more "dance floor" you have to work out together issues where you don't agree. Time and time again I have noticed that the more agreements you have confirmed with the person you are doing business with, the less you have to worry about the ultimate "No thank you".

Tall Order?

I did some work with some financial traders at a large international bank a number of years ago and they had an interesting problem.

They made multimillion dollar foreign exchange and interest deals using sometimes four or five words. Their stated challenge was how to make them in three or four instead. Upon recovering from the shock of this tall order, I encouraged them to pay close attention to both their clients breathing and their own.

Sure enough, it turned out that when the decision to do the transaction was consciously, even effortlessly made on the out breath the more sound the deal was. Ending on the outbreath contributed to a more cooperative relationship and it meant much less was needed to be said afterward.

The three, four or five words was, for the most part, an exaggeration; but the point was that the quality of the agreements increased just from paying attention to some normally neglected information. What they agreed upon stuck.

I have since tested this tool on at least one hundred other groups and the evidence is that the quality of their agreements increased in direct proportion to how much each participant was willing to breathe and to observe breathing.

Not surprisingly, the more self conscious or embarrassed they felt observing other people breathing the more their results stayed the same. It is a lot like comparing two dance partners. How enjoyable is it dancing with someone focused on how embarrassing it is to dance, compared to one that is enjoying the experience and breathing in a relaxed way?

The more the participants were open to observing breathing as a service to both themselves and their clients, the better their agreements stuck!

Agreement means nothing left to say, done! Next subject.

Notice the correlation between satisfaction and not having to talk further. Picture that calm pond at sunset again. What if an agreement that sticks has that same quality? The silence says it all doesn't it? To add anything to the agreement after that would be like trying to calm the water further by throwing something else into it.

Agreement is the result after all the reasons, justifications and excuses have been handled and there is nothing else to say but "yes." Agreements that stick become easier to accomplish when you train yourself to observe how much or how little still needs to be said.

Stop Being Polite!

Stop being polite! Practice agreeing to satisfy. Some tips to improve your ability to agree:

- Observe how often you agree just to be polite compared to agreeing with the intention to satisfy. What would be the benefit of just saying "no thank you" directly?
- Notice the correlation between agreements that stick and personal integrity.
- Check how easily you are breathing and whether you are agreeing on the in or out breath.
- Note the quality and flexibility of your relationships compared with your (and your listener's) ease of breathing.
- See if your quality of life improves in relationship to the more importance you place on agreeing to satisfy.

With a little practice you too will become an agreement fanatic and a master of creating "agreements that stick"!

What could our world look like then?