



The Personal Record that Wasn't

By Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA

I was coming into the final stretch of the 5K race knowing that I was running the best time I had run in about ten years. My legs were pumping, my heart was pounding, sweat was soaking my whole body, but I felt great because all of my hard effort was about to pay off. I could see the clock at the finish line and I knew I was going to finish in less than twenty-one minutes, about two minutes faster than I thought I would run.

I experienced this joy on a recent Saturday morning. This race was part of a 1900 mile training regimen I had set up with my daughter, Julie, to help her attain her goal of running in the Ohio State High School Cross Country Championships next fall. We have trained all through the winter. We have run in snow storms and in zero degree temperatures. It has been very painful at times, but deeply rewarding. It has built a close bond between Julie and I that transcends our goal of running 1900 miles together this year.

But my elation about the aforementioned race was short lived. Shortly after finishing and being told by Julie that she had won the women's division of the race in a personal record of 19:55 I was told by the runner who finished behind me that the distance we had just run was only 4.6 kilometers, not 5 kilometers. What a letdown. That fact meant we had to add roughly two minutes to our time and we would never really know how fast we had run, or where Julie was on her track to achieve her goal. I was frustrated enough that I went over and told the race coordinator about it. He told me he already knew and then looked at me as if to say, "So what?" I was disappointed in him. I'm sure we will not be running that race next year.

It got me to thinking about the importance of being reliable. Woody Allen once said, "Ninety percent of success is showing up." He is right. Unfortunately what happened in that race is all too common. Too often we promise others we will call them back and then don't. We promise to follow up with someone else and then we don't follow through. We show up for work or meetings late and we wonder why opportunities keep passing us by. I certainly am not perfect in the area, but I believe that whatever success ILS has achieved is chiefly because we consistently do what we say we are going to do. We are reliable. Consequently, it's not uncommon for us to turn a very small amount of business with a firm into a very large contract. My sense is that this happens because we are given these opportunities because we earn the trust of the companies we work with.

Trust is a funny thing. It is very hard to earn, but very easy to lose. It takes a many repetitions of someone being reliable to earn our trust, but only a few slipups to lose that trust. I believe that trust is the foundation of any healthy relationship. It is worth a great deal of effort to earn and maintain.

Here are some thoughts about what we have learned over many years about reliability and trust. I hope that they are helpful to you:

- 1) Always under promise and over deliver. This takes a great deal of discipline, but generally pays off handsomely later on.
- 2) Don't promise something you don't think you can deliver. Learn what you are good at and deliver that exceptionally well.
- 3) Get training or go to school to increase your value in the marketplace so that you can reliably offer more services to others.

- 4) Don't overbook your schedule. Always leave time in between meetings for the little emergencies that you know are going to crop up during the day.
- 5) Always arrive early for meetings. I believe that one of the best ways to show respect for someone else is to be waiting for them when they show up for the meeting. This is especially true if you are meeting with a customer or with your boss.
- 6) If you screw up don't make excuses. That suggests to the other party that you will probably do it again. Apologize and make amends.