

WATCH IT!

By Julius E. Rhodes, SPHR

I have heard it said many times that if there is a choice between what you say and what you do, people will always pay attention to what you do. While I do not disagree with this statement, I would like to add another point of view on the subject.

To be sure, actions are essential to the way others form their opinions of you and about how you conduct yourself. What I have also learned, though, is that this assumes the people watching you have unbiased motives and can and will assess your actions for what they are instead of what they wish them to be or want to read into them. Of course, we all realize we don't live in a world free of biases or full of pure intentions.

So where does this leave us? The old adage I referenced above needs to be updated to reflect the modern reality; technology has made our world much smaller and subjects our lives to much greater scrutiny on a variety of levels. Therefore, I think the new saying might more appropriately be: If there is a choice between what you say and what you do, people will pay attention to what you do but also what you say and how you say it.

Words Matter

Words matter, and now more than ever people will attempt to read into your words based on how you present them. They hear whatever interpretation they believe will best represent their intentions, not yours. Without being overly cynical, I do want to tell you there is hope for a brighter tomorrow, but it requires patience and a great deal of work.


To overcome the pitfall of having people insert their intentions into your words and actions, you need to be consistent and develop advocates who can and will carry your message forward in the way you intended (A word of

caution: I believe you will never be able to totally eliminate the challenge. There is always residual risk involved.). This is difficult and requires patience, as you will need to check in with people early and often to ensure the messages you are communicating through words and actions are being received in the manner you intended.

Ultimately, you cannot run around trying to track down everything you do to ensure what you meant syncs with how others interpret it, but you will need to identify key stakeholders who are willing to listen to you and share their unbiased point of view. The more time you invest doing this, the better off you will be down the road.

The Real World

Here is how this works out in a real-world situation many of you have faced or know about. I contend that anybody can paint a wall. However, the difference between painting a wall and painting a wall well is the prep work required to ensure a proper foundation so your efforts have the best result. Proper painting requires masking off the areas you don't want painted, putting down drop cloths, and investing in the right tools to do the job in the best possible way.

There is similar prep work required for your actions and words to be interpreted properly. Yes, it is time consuming, and yes, it's not always the most enjoyable work, but doing so will make for a much better outcome and save you heartache down the road. 



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