



## Liz on Leadership

### Are Broken Promises Damaging Your Brand?

A broken promise is a powerful thing.

I am writing to you the weekend of Prom—specifically, PennsburyProm, known by many as “The Best Prom in America.”

Over the years, Prom has grown into a significant community event, with volunteers of all ages working together for nearly 12 months, putting in thousands of hours in collective preparation. Prom has drawn some big-time performers over the years, including John Mayer, Maroon 5 and Metro Station.

This year’s big act is Questlove, a Philadelphia local and leader of the Tonight Show house band. Exciting stuff for the Pennsbury community—but it almost didn’t happen. As of Thursday, Questlove had apparently canceled the performance, just 48 hours ahead of Prom.

You can imagine the uproar that ensued. Students immediately took to Twitter and Facebook to cajole, complain and denounce the artist’s failure to live up to his commitment. The story was quickly covered by local media. It literally became the talk of the town.

They say any publicity is good publicity, but this is not the kind of attention you want to attract.

The truth is, there is little that will more rapidly rouse the ire and mistrust of your organization (and customers and business partners) than a promise broken. When you don’t stand by your commitments, you run the risk of a damaged reputation and sullied brand.

Once people begin to perceive you as unreliable, they may also label you as inauthentic and untrustworthy. They might stop taking you at your word. They may grow reluctant to enter into agreements with you. They may begin to guard important information, reflecting the serious breakdown in trust.

Under these conditions, it can be awfully difficult to lead.

Here are three ways to protect your reputation from tarnish.

1. **Be careful what you promise.** Only offer or commit to actions that you are confident you can deliver and over which you have full control.
2. **Be upfront about it.** If changing circumstances absolutely mandate a change in plans, don't wait for words to slip out. Provide context. Offer a valid explanation. If you can provide a legitimate rationale, people are more likely to forgive.
3. **If you can't deliver, take the heat.** Apologize for the miss. Don't shy away from blame or point the finger at anyone else. A good leader is accountable for her actions. Anything less will erode trust and credibility. Once that's gone, it's gone.

The social media campaign apparently got Questlove's attention. He made it to Prom, reconnected with his fans, and put on a terrific show. And that's a very good thing. If he hadn't lived up to his word, the damage to his reputation may well have been irreparable.

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## *Did you miss my last newsletter?*

### **From Opponent to Ally:**

#### **How to Turn Adversaries into Your Best Advocates**

I flew to Chicago last month to participate in Alan Weiss' Million Dollar Consulting Convention. I was joined there by an exceptional cohort of friends and colleagues — an array of business experts from across the world. It was a terrific event, punctuated by a compelling keynote by Wharton's Jonah Berger, who was there to share insights from his new book, [Contagious](#).

On my first evening in town, two of my colleagues joined me for dinner at my downtown hotel. We enjoyed a few appetizers, shared a bit of wine, laughed and talked for hours. Just as we began to wind down the conversation, one of my colleagues politely pointed out that she'd found a "foreign object" (a jagged staple) in the food. Not so appetizing and potentially dangerous, were it to have been ingested.

Of course, most of us have had unsatisfactory restaurant experiences from time to time. But discovering a piece of metal in your food is the kind of thing you might be tempted to tell others about, both in person and across social media. And as we all know, an unhappy customer can create real headaches for a business trying to establish or maintain a spotless reputation.

An opponent in the workplace can have a similar impact on your personal brand. They can say unflattering things about you, withhold support for a key initiative, raise concern over a coveted promotion, or pose any number of other obstacles to your success.

Look closely at your work relationships and identify your overt adversaries as well as your hard-to-spot saboteurs. Figure out why they are opposing you and don't make any assumptions. It may be a matter of organizational politics. It might be a personality clash. It may be the result of conflicting agendas. Or it just might reflect a failure to fully engage them, appreciate their perspective and win their support for what you are trying to achieve. Regardless of the reason, you'll need to sort things out quickly if you are to be successful.

Here are four steps to rapidly get back on track:

1. **Make the covert overt.** Openly acknowledge the issue. Brushing problems under the rug never works for long.
2. **Ask the other person's point of view.** You needn't be solicitous, but you do need to be open, non-defensive and genuinely curious about the problem. Did you do or say something wrong? Did you fail to invite your colleague to an important meeting or neglect to seek her perspective on a new project? What is your contribution to the current situation?
3. **Own it.** If you've inadvertently offended or harmed the other person, apologize and offer to right your wrong. A simple "I'm sorry" goes a remarkably long way. Don't allow your pride to get in the way.
4. **Learn and move on.** What's the key takeaway? Is there a remedy that can be applied to other situations and with other stakeholders? If so, learn quickly, add the new approach to your toolkit, and get right back in the game.

At the end of our dinner in Chicago, the restaurant manager walked over to our table, sincerely apologized for the poor experience and gave us the entire meal on the house. He asked what else he could do to remedy the situation. He was gracious and genuine throughout. As a result, I now have zero temptation to warn others to steer clear of the hotel or its restaurant. On the contrary, I readily tell people what a terrific customer experience I had. And I will surely be willing to give them another chance.

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## Interview - Marilyn Russell's Remarkable Women

On April 19, I joined Marilyn Russell of CBS Philadelphia radio to discuss my forthcoming book, *Slow Down to Speed Up!* Marilyn and her listeners got the inside scoop on how to be more strategic, efficient and focused, even as information and demands come at us at a breakneck pace. Listen in for a sneak peek at my tools for improving impact and accelerating success in today's 24/7 world.

[Listen to the April 19th interview here](#)

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## About Dr. Liz

Dr. Liz Bywater has been called a one-of-a-kind leadership expert. Working at the intersection of business and psychology, she brings together pragmatic experience, advising top executives across the Fortune 500, with an advanced degree in Psychology and a dynamic personal style to inspire, engage and counsel her clients.

For more than a decade, top global organizations have requested Liz's help in resolving issues such as creating extraordinary client relationships, increasing market persuasion, and driving productive collaborations in an increasingly complex world.

Liz advises senior leaders at some of the world's most successful companies, including Johnson & Johnson, Nike, Thomson Reuters, Bristol-Myers Squibb, AmerisourceBergen and more. She uses her expertise in human behavior to drive commercial success. She helps her clients propel innovation, exert influence and lead their organizations through change.

A thought leader in organizational excellence, Liz provides expert commentary for such publications as the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Fast Company and USA Today. She is on the editorial advisory board for *Life Science Leader* magazine and is a featured expert on such radio broadcasts as CBS Philadelphia's *Philadelphia Agenda* with Brad Segall and *Woman of the Week* with Marilyn Russell.

Liz earned her PhD in Psychology at the Derner Institute for Advanced Psychological Studies at Adelphi University. Her undergraduate degree is from Cornell University, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Cum Laude. She is a longstanding member of the American Psychological Association and the Society for the Advancement of Consulting. She lives in scenic Bucks County, PA, with her husband and two teenage children. Stay tuned for Liz's forthcoming book, *Slow Down to Speed Up!* (Business Expert Press, Fall 2017).

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