



talking about...

September 2007

... designing better relationships for better outcomes

Promises, Promises, Promises

"Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future, making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible."

... Hannah Arendt (1906 - 1975) German-US political scientist

The capacity to make a promise is perhaps the key characteristic of human language. Making promises allows us to create a future beyond our immediate interactions. Throughout the ages, human beings have been able to create extremely complex societies based on our ability to make a commitment to something at a future date and then stick to it.

Think about your own world and all the promises that you make or that are made to you. If you take even a few minutes to examine this, you will undoubtedly find that you live within a vast web of commitments. If you work for someone, your employer promises to provide you with certain benefits in return for your commitment to deliver certain services. If you are in a relationship, then it is likely that at some point you and your partner made some sort of commitment to each other. Each day, we ask people to do something and they promise to do it and vice versa. When they make a promise to us, we then act as though the promised actions are going to occur. This is not a trivial matter. The promises in our lives are central to the way in which we achieve outcomes beyond our own actions and, as a result, establish the quality of our relationships with others.

Most people tend to utilise promises in relation to specific tasks they want others to do for them. Although this is a valuable aspect of the role of a promise, there is another area in which the role of a commitment is generally under-utilised. This is the area of future behaviour in terms of a relationship between two people. The most common approach people take to another person's behaviour that they do not like is to tell them about it and hope they will get the message. This often leads to resentment when the message does not appear to be taken on board and the behaviour continues. An approach that is more likely to generate a change in behaviour is to make a request to the other person asking them to behave in a way that would be more appropriate. If the person accepts then it sets a context for future conversations about that behaviour. If they do not agree, it sets up a conversation for what might be mutually acceptable behaviour. Either way it creates greater clarity of expectation.

This is particularly relevant to those seeking cultural change. Through the creation of commitments with their team, organisational leaders can begin to establish a web of commitments to different behaviour rather just relying on expectation.

Although promises are not a gilt-edged guarantee that something will happen, they provide a strong possibility it will occur and set up a context for the future. By getting a commitment from another person to act differently in their relationship with us, we greatly enhance the possibility of change.

"Half the promises people say were never kept, were never made."

... Edgar Watson Howe
(1853 - 1937) US editor, novelist, humorist, essayist

The Value of a Teacher ...

Thanks to our friend Julie Botten for this one ...

The dinner guests were sitting around the table discussing life. One man, a CEO, decided to explain the problem with education. He argued, "What's a kid going to learn from someone who decided his best option in life was to become a teacher?" He reminded the other dinner guests what they say about teachers: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach."

To stress his point he said to another guest; "You're a teacher, Bonnie. Be honest. What do you make?"

Bonnie, who had a reputation for honesty and frankness replied, "You want to know what I make?"

She paused for a second then began.

"Well, I make kids work harder than they ever thought they could. I make a C+ feel like the Congressional Medal of Honour. I make kids sit through 40 minutes of class time when their parents can't make them sit for 5 without an I POD, Game Cube or movie rental... You want to know what I make?"

Talking About Pty Ltd

PO Box 6652,
St Kilda Rd Central,
Victoria, 8008.

Ph: +613 9507 2464

info@talkingabout.com.au
www.talkingabout.com.au

She paused again and looked at each and every person at the table.

"I make kids wonder. I make them question. I make them criticise. I make them apologise and mean it. I make them have respect and take responsibility for their actions. I teach them to write and then I make them write. I make them read, read, read. I make them show all their work in math. I make my students from other countries learn everything they need to know in English while preserving their unique cultural identity. I make my classroom a place where all my students feel safe. Finally, I make them understand that if they use the gifts they were given, work hard, and follow their hearts, they can succeed in life."

Bonnie paused one last time and then continued.

"Then, when people try to judge me by what I make, I can hold my head up high and pay no attention because they are ignorant... You want to know what I make? I MAKE A DIFFERENCE. What do you make?"

We thought we would share this with all of you who create a space for others to learn and, in doing so, make a difference for them!

"A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though awakens your own expectations."

... Patricia Neal (1926 -) US actress

Our Web Site

More articles and information about our work can be found at our web site, www.talkingabout.com.au. We invite you to take a look.

Subscribing to talking about ...

Do you know others who might be interested in reading our e-zine? If so please feel free to send them a copy or ask them to register by sending an e-mail to info@talkingabout.com.au.

To unsubscribe from this e-zine, simply reply to this e-mail with the word "unsubscribe" in the subject area.

Copyright © 2007
Talking About Pty Ltd
ACN 112 307 892
info@talkingabout.com.au
Telephone: +61 3 9507 2464