

Practical Preparation



Work to prevent unfinished projects and unkept promises.

by Kim Pettit

Once I led a planning meeting with several Christians. David, a seminary student, had many ideas for improving our work. He brought great energy to our discussion. However, when asked which steps he would be willing to undertake in order to implement these ideas, he remarked, "I'm a thinker, not a doer." Someone else, Miriam, volunteered for many tasks I would have liked David to do.

David was not the only one who declined responsibility. Karen also said "No." She committed to doing one or two tasks, and declined the rest. And, though I would have liked her to do more, the things she did do, she did well.

The next time we met, I asked those present if they had completed their work. Miriam reported she'd failed to do what she'd planned to accomplish. In fact, she did not recall some of the responsibilities she'd asked for, and did not come to the meeting prepared.

I value people who not only have ideas, but also follow-through. It is easy to overcommit, overreach, overpromise. But for an enterprise to succeed, it requires both a well-thought out plan and people who dedicate themselves to making it happen.

As I plan for the next year, I see a million worthwhile projects. I see new directions and new subjects for *InterLit*. And, I know I am not alone. Most editors I know want to improve their products. There are dozens of manuscripts to publish and new products we'd like to develop. There are new marketing strategies and new distribution channels to explore.

How then do we prepare for the work ahead? How can we prevent our good intentions from turning into excuses three, six or nine months down the road?

Prioritize. At the time of our meeting, Karen's health was declining. How did she select which tasks she would do? Karen chose those tasks where she could make the most effective contribution given her limited energy. And, because she accepted certain tasks, I could delegate remaining duties to others in the room.

Have the courage to say no. Though David could have expressed himself with more grace, he essentially said the same thing Karen said:

"My skills, time and resources do not allow me to take on the work you are asking for at this time." They made a realistic assessment of what they could accomplish, and did not promise more than they could deliver. Was I offended by David's blunt dismissal? I was. But I've come to appreciate knowing exactly what he will and will not do. Miriam, on the other hand, caused me a great many headaches.

In some cultures it is very difficult to refuse a direct request. People change the subject, hedge, or promise to keep a deadline, and then keep promising to come through *mañana*. But no matter what cultural context we live in, Christians are to be honest. "Let your "Yes" be yes, and your "No," no," writes James (5:12).

Keep track of your commitments. I doubt that Miriam intended to fail as she did. She is a devout believer and her enthusiasm is contagious. However, her lack of follow-through besmirched her testimony before the non-Christians we worked with at a secular company. And though I share her faith, I hesitated to work with her on future projects.

Devote yourself fully to the task. When you do promise something, like Karen did, do your best to deliver a quality product. Remember that even if no one else sees what you do, "it is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:24).

Having said all this, I must admit my skills and style are different from Miriam's, David's, and Karen's. But all of us are called to serve. So, how can we prepare for the work ahead? These guidelines are a start, but there is more: we can prepare for the future through *prayer*.

We at Cook ask for your prayers as we fulfill our responsibilities, and commit to also pray for you. There are always more books to release, more people to reach, greater distribution to achieve. Let us walk confidently ahead, trusting that as we pray for one another, where God has led, he will abundantly provide. ❖

Don't let your good intentions turn into excuses.