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where's the emergency



EXIT

“...If disaster strikes or the lights go out, you'll know how to find the exit.”

After the lights go out in the movie theater, in that moment of darkness before the screen lights up, the only things immediately visible are the EXIT signs above the doors at the sides and back of the theater. Then, when the screen begins to glow, what do you see? The following message: “In case of an emergency, walk—don't run—to the nearest exit.”

After advising you to turn off your cell phone and buckle your seatbelt, the flight attendant informs you, “There are six emergency exits on this aircraft. Take a moment to locate the exit closest to you. Note that the nearest exit may be behind you.”

There are clearly marked EXIT signs above the stairwell doors in your office building. And, on each floor, there are signs advising you to use the stairs and not the elevator in case of a fire.

Before the movie starts, the plane leaves the ground, or a fire breaks out, you are informed about an exit plan.

All around us we have “exits”—preplanned strategies that allow us to escape precarious situations.

So, what's your exit for a sales call that has wandered way off course and has become a waste of your time?

What is your exit for a business relationship with a client who is not living up to his commitments, but still insists that you live up to yours?

What is your exit for the relationship with the employee who is not performing regardless of your coaxing, coaching, demands, or threats?

Like the exit doors in the movie theater, airplane, or office building, which are designed before the structure is built, your exits must also be designed before you begin building your relationships.

Your exits are actually up-front agreements you establish with the other party early in the relationship. These agreements should spell out exactly what needs to be done and the purpose for doing it. When the objectives are established and agreed to up front, it's easier to recognize when the relationship goes off track and what must happen to get it back on track.

Failure to clearly define and agree to an intended outcome of a relationship—especially a new relationship—is the most frequent cause of disagreements, disappointments, unfulfilled expectations, and the eventual demise of the relationship. The agreement should not only define objectives, but also the time by which they are met. The agreement should clearly define the responsibilities of all parties involved—who's doing what and by when.

Consequences for nonperformance—missing a deadline or failing to achieve a goal or meet a commitment—should also be defined and included in the agreement. Similarly, the subsequent steps if goals are achieved or deadlines met should also be described.

Developing your up-front agreement—your exit—should not be done hastily or without serious thought. After all, it will be the map for navigating the relationship as well as the benchmark for measuring its success. And, if disaster strikes or the lights go out, you'll know how to find the EXIT. 🚪



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