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The 80/20 Rule – The Quiet Connection (Part 2)

Everyone, without exception, has experienced a situation in the past where our actions (what we've done) or our words (what we've said) have left a lasting impression—positive or negative. This collection of actions and words represents a large part of our *20% lifestory*. This collection also accounts for a large measure of how we are valued by other people with first hand knowledge of this lifestory. If your *20% lifestory* has caused, or is causing, a negative impression, it is important to take action that will mitigate the effect—the effect being loss of respect.

There are many reasons why we engage in action or express words that may leave a lasting negative impression. Based on my analysis and study, while writing my book—*Respect: Gaining It and Sustaining It*, I identified two primary underlying causes. These are: **poor judgment**, and **bad habits**. Both of these are sometimes traceable to one's value system. Nevertheless, it is important to learn to take action that will lessen the effect of lasting negative impressions.

Poor Judgment is typically due to lack of knowledge, or extreme emotion such as anger, fear, sadness, etc. When a person lacks ample knowledge or is subjected to an extreme emotion, there is a heightened tendency for poor judgment. This statement assumes a lack of mental illness—a very serious condition needing professional care and assistance.

Bad Habits are most commonly due to patterns of behavior developed from a young age.

In either case—poor judgment or bad habits—both of these are sometimes traceable to one's value system.

The first step is to develop the ability to recognize when you have done, or said, something with a potential to leave a lasting negative impression. This ability will vary and will depend on the environment—home, workplace, school, social setting, or public setting—and on the nature of your relationship with those around you; however, there are often always signs to look for. The most obvious sign usually is a sudden change, or a dramatic gradual change in behavior or attitude—toward you—by those around you. Many people do and say things everyday without taking a mental note of the subtle feedback being transmitted all around them. Later on these people are always surprised at how they could have missed these subtle signs. There is a saying in the sport of tennis—you cannot touch what you do not see!—meaning, if you do not see the ball, then you have no chance to hit the ball back (to your opponent). This is why tennis instructors always tell their students "*keep your eyes on the ball.*"

Author of RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It

Paperback ISBN13: 978-1-4257-7535-3 | Hardcover ISBN13: 978-1-4257-7575-9

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The next step is to confirm the potential for negative impression due to what you have done or said. This simply means that you follow up with someone or several people—trustworthy or objective individuals—that can confirm such potential. Sometimes you do not have to go far if there is only one person involved in the unfolding situation.

Then comes the critical and difficult step—for most individuals. This step involves mitigating the negative lasting effect of the prevailing action or words. This has to be done very soon after recognizing and confirming the potential for negative impression. The passage of time is a significant factor here. The more time that passes the more difficult it will be to mitigate. Why is this step critical? Because the action or words you choose to mitigate (that is, lessen) the negative impression may become the new action or new words that turn the table and create a positive lasting impression after all! Think about it—the best antidote for the occurrence of potentially lasting negative impression is the immediate occurrence of potentially lasting positive impression.

So what types of action or words can mitigate the various bad situations that we are discussing here? It all depends on the specific nature of the situation at hand; however, two effective methods, that have been proven time and time again, are: (i) expressing or issuing a sincere apology, and (ii) expressing clarification of a situation that may have been misunderstood or miscommunicated.

In short, learn to know when you've done or said something that can diminish the way others value you; take an appropriate measure to minimize the effect or its impact; and lastly take preventive measures not to repeat the damaging action or repeat the damaging words by learning from the whole experience.

Lastly, the final step in the process of taking action that will lessen the effect of lasting negative impressions is to reflect and learn from the whole experience. Learning from our life experiences is a natural human habit? The problem is that we often reflect and seek to learn from the *80% lifestory* that leave little or no lasting impression, and learn little, or nothing, from the *20% lifestory* that leave the most lasting impression—very ironic!

In summary, the process boils down to this—*Recognize, Confirm, Mitigate, and Learn*. These four steps, in essence, represent a set of habits that one can cultivate to turn a negative *20% lifestory* into a more positive *20% lifestory*. This translates to a higher valuation of you—by others—and respect is, after all, a measure of valuation. A negative *20% lifestory* can be very damaging—to some degree within one's immediate family, to a larger degree within one's extended family, and to a more significant degree in one's workplace where a career may be at stake. The reverse, however, brings many long term benefits. (Reader views welcome: ektimis@ntaiwo.com)

Cheers and thank you – N. Taiwo

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