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The devil's in the detail

You've probably often heard the expression, 'The devil's in the detail'. It's an adage that sums up something many of us in the service industry have forgotten: that in any relationship, it's not always the grand, sweeping event or action that leaves the most lasting impression. Rather, it's the little, day to day activities of our interaction, that start to pile up the 'critical mass' that forms the image and impression of who we are, what we do and how we do what we do.

Ask yourself:

- Do I have a business quality statement or checklist that I share with new hires when I take them into my business?
- What do I do to share my passion and vision for the business with members of my staff?
- How do I help each staff member find a sense of relevance and purpose so they want to behave the way I behave with clients?
- Do my staff members think and act with a sense of ownership in the business – or just like unhappy, unmotivated employees?
- What quality assurance (QA) systems do I have in place to check that everything going out from us spells 'excellence'?
- When last did I invite staff to offer suggestions that might add value to our business offering and further enhance our image?
- Is there a mentoring system in place or are staffers left to find their own feet and, as the saying goes, 'sink or swim'?

The reason for this checklist is because if you haven't spelled out very clearly how you want to portray your business; those working with and around you will project your business from their value, belief, attitude, perception and behavioural perspective. That could land your carefully crafted image and reputation in trouble. They may be doing what they believe is their level best – but does it align with the vision and the goals you have for your business?

Your leadership style will affect your ability to inspire attention to quality and essential detail. If, like me, you're a male, chances are that you somehow expect people to mind-read. We hope that a

process of osmosis will have them absorb, through their pores, our thought-processes and intentions. It doesn't quite work like that. We often think things through in great detail in our heads, but then assume we've effectively communicated them via a couple of terse sentences.

There's a delightful line from the area of Neurolinguistics. It reads, "The meaning of the communication is the result you get." That means, how people respond, how they carry out your instructions or requests, reflects their understanding of what you meant. Sometimes even the most explicit communication (so we think!) may result in a rather odd interpretation or execution. So remind yourself – this is how they interpreted what I want. It's a sobering bit of belly-button contemplation.

If, again like me, you're the lone wolf-type businessperson, then ensure that you have a so-called 'people-person' between you and those who work in your business. You need someone high on emotional intelligence (self- and other-understanding), empathy and communication skills. An inflexible or non-versatile introvert is infrequently a natural and effective leader except in situations where the position requires authoritarian rule. The extroverted, egalitarian (even-sighted, even-handed), gregarious (sociable and people-loving) individual is likely to be more successful where getting the job done requires a relationship, rather than a task, focus.

Maybe you are indeed the visionary entrepreneur who had the dream and got your business up and running. That doesn't necessarily mean that you're the best person to run it in the consolidation or maturation stage of its life-cycle. Give it some thought. Understand where your strengths lie and ensure you play to them.

Let's pull the threads of this narrative together: Bobby Gee, an international image consultant, once said, "Elephants don't bite but mosquitoes do. Enough mosquito bites can be extremely irritating." That applies to any relationship – yours with your staff members or theirs with your clients. Watch the detail. It won't take care of itself. But those scraps of detail, added together, will project an image and concept about your business which you may discover, too late, is one you didn't really want in the first place.