

MEASURE TWICE, CUT ONCE

By: Robert Sher

A husband wants to do something special for his wife's birthday and leaves a message on her cell phone to pack for a weekend ski getaway and meet him at his office after work.

She shows up at his office with a suitcase full of tropical clothing and a brand new set of water skis. He stares at her, baffled, holding snow skis for downhill skiing.

What went wrong? She assumed her husband was taking her water skiing. Instead, he planned a downhill ski trip. The problem: He was not clear.

This example might seem far fetched but it does illustrate a point I make often when coaching young executives about the importance of being clear.

He made a mistake I see far too often in the business world. As decision makers, you must know that making choices based on sound data is essential to reaching your goals. In the case of the ski trip gone awry, planning the perfect escape for a spouse required more details than the husband provided so his wife could be prepared.

It is critical that you are always clear when telling someone what you want. It is also important to be clear about where you anticipate going. This lesson applies to everything you do at home, work or play. To really drive this point home, I'd like to use the example of the good carpenter who measures twice and cuts once before every building project.

This simple maxim makes immediate sense.

A carpenter must always make a measurement, check the raw materials, measure again to be sure, mark the mark and check the mark – all before making a single cut. By doing this, the good carpenter generally makes the right cut time and again.

Having measured twice, it is still possible to saw badly but it *is* much easier to change a line on a board than to fix a cut in the wrong place. How much better, then, is it to make the small extra effort needed to measure that second time, to check your work, and to get it right before you commit?

How many times have you violated the "measure twice" rule in other realms of action? Consider a relationship with someone you hold dear or respect deeply—a friend, a parent, a teacher, spouse or colleague. There are times when you will be under pressure, tired, angry, hurt, threatened, or just not paying attention, when you might give in to the temptation to make a cutting remark that could jeopardize a friendship.

Be sure about what you are about to do and say to avoid making mistakes. If you would measure twice before saying something to someone else, you could cut down on waste, damaged relationships and bruised feelings. Measuring twice before taking a new job, giving a new assignment, planning a trip, would help each of you know you were making the right decisions. Measure twice – cut once.

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