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Wendy Riemann: Building snowmen in July!?

Posted on Thursday, Jul 27, 2017

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Perhaps because it has been so hot the past couple of weeks, or maybe because we just celebrated Christmas in July, I have been thinking about winter and snowmen.

In college, I dated a gentleman from Georgia who had never seen snow before (a shock to this Wisconsinite – no wonder the relationship melted fast). After a snowstorm, we went outside so he could make his first snowman. The shock-and-awe look on his face as he watched how the snow pulled up from the ground to roll into a bigger and bigger snowball is engrained in my memory forever. He had no idea (packy) snow could do that (I guess maybe he thought all snowmen were made from magic, like Frosty or Olaf).

Rolling the various sized snowballs puts the foundation in place for the base, middle, and head of the snowman.

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Yet, maybe even more fascinating is that while a snowball rolls together easily, a snowman ball cannot be unrolled. We could break it or melt it, but unlike, say a crescent roll, a snowball does not become undone by simply rolling in reverse. What is done is done.

This is a true lesson for advocacy, communication, and life.

If we put a message out there that is not true when we advocate, we do ourselves a disservice and may lose the trust we gained with a colleague – i.e. the built snowball foundation loses some of its shape.

If we say something we do not mean when communicating out of spite, anger, or another emotion, those words can never be taken back. Sure, we can say "just kidding," or even, "I'm sorry," and we can decorate the snowman with a huge carrot nose, or a beautiful hat and scarf, to try to cover things up, but we know what is really underneath.

If we make a decision and it ends up not being the best choice, we often do not get a do-over. We need to keep rolling forward and amend how we maneuver in our future.

And, while I personally have never adorned my snowman with footwear, if we put ourselves in the other person's shoes more often, we could prevent more misinformation, hurt feelings, and missed steps.

The GOOD news is that we can also use our words and actions to create footsteps that others are happy to hear and follow.

For instance, providing strong facts or key information to a staff member in a time of need is not soon forgotten. Or, taking the time to tell someone their work made a meaningful difference in a project's success encourages them to achieve even more. Or, making the right selection, even though it was unpopular, provides a satisfaction of contributing to the greater good.

These types of words and actions will not be unrolled. In fact, they will likely have a meaningful impact long after the snow melts.

Whether positive or negative, fact or fiction, our words and actions have consequences for ourselves, other people, and our relationships – and they add up.

The article, *"Science Says Lasting Relationships Come Down to 2 Basic Traits,"* ran in the November 9, 2014 edition of The Atlantic. Researchers studied couples and separated them into two groups – the masters and the disasters. The masters were still happily together after six years of marriage, while the disasters either ended or were chronically unhappy. In short, the biggest difference researchers found was that the master couples brought a spirit of kindness and generosity to the relationship, while the disasters brought contempt, criticism, and hostility.

Which couples would have the better-looking snowmen in the yard? Spouse or not, to varying degrees, these behaviors transcend into all our relationship outcomes.

Kindness matters.

Our words and actions are building snowmen every day. Eyes made out of coal, buttons, and a pipe may look nice on the outside, or temporarily make us feel warm on the inside, however building a strong snowman foundation is best for long-term success.

— Riemann is president of 1492 Communications, a consulting firm. Like 1492 Communications on Facebook to learn more.