



SIGNAL YOUR TURNS

"There's a gap sometimes between what I think I'm indicating to the world and what is really being put out there by me."

-Patti Digh

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

Do you recall your first driving lesson? I remember mine. It began with my mom announcing her extraordinary skills as a driving instructor. What a nightmare that was.

As we got into the front seat of Mom's boat-sized Ford station wagon, she rattled off a list of do's and don'ts faster than I could assimilate them. I twisted the key in the ignition while she leaned inches from my ear with a furrowed brow and the stiff jaw of a drill sergeant. With my heart in my throat, I backed out of the driveway, crept down the long winding lane and eased my foot on the brake as we approached an intersection. With a sideward glance, I noticed Mom was smiling. Perhaps I had remembered more of what she told me than I had thought. When the traffic cleared, I looked both ways and turned onto the four-lane road. Suddenly Mom yelled, "Signal your turns! Always signal your turns!"

At the time, I was frustrated by all the things I had to remember while driving. But like so many other things we do repetitively, over time it all becomes second nature. Now let's apply a similar concept to our negotiations with property owners. Much like changing our route while driving, often times negotiations can quickly change direction. But are we properly signaling the other party?

For example, imagine a property owner in this situation. After the agent carefully explains the project and answers a few

questions in a thoughtful and methodical way, the agent checks his watch. He suddenly realizes that he's running late and needs to wrap up the meeting. Without explanation or warning, he abruptly pulls out the agreement and points to the signature line. The owner is surprised by the sudden shift from the well-paced meeting and wonders whether they can (or should) trust this agent. The negotiations stall.

What could the agent have said to signal his change in direction? There are a variety of ways to bring closure to a meeting without an abrupt stop or a lengthy excuse. He could have simply explained that time had passed quickly, and he just realized he would need to wrap up the meeting. Then he could have asked if there were any final concerns or questions before things were finalized.

By using a verbal signal, the agent shows respect for the owner and their concerns. Here are a few suggestions for concluding a meeting:

"Thank you for working with me to come up with solutions that benefit both yourself and my company. If you don't have any further questions, the last item of business is to sign the agreement."

"If you're satisfied with our decisions, are you ready to sign the agreement?"

"Now that we've agreed to a, b and c (itemize the solutions), I believe we're ready to have the agreement signed."

We need to understand that we're all interconnected. What the agent says and does affects the owner. Conversely, what the owner says and does affects the agent. Even the slightest nod or furrowed brow can signal a breakdown in communication. Without a verbal signal, the other party is forced to arrive at their own conclusion. And that's when problems can arise.

As with driving, human beings change lanes all the time. We shift our direction, slow and accelerate, take detours and make turns. It helps if the people around us are aware of our intentions so they can shift accordingly. If they don't receive the signal, a gap is created between what we intended and what was received. It is imperative that we signal our turn, let the other party know we're changing our course and provide a reason why.

Signal. Communicate. That's how we get things done.

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