

RESPONSIVENESS

What is responsiveness?

Responsiveness refers to the consistent demonstration of the ability to respond within reasonable timelines to all manner of requests for information, assistance and service.

Why is it important to be responsive?

If your goal is to be the most effective you can be and a valued member of a team, it is crucial that you cultivate the habit of being responsive. Responsiveness shows respect for others. If someone makes contact with you and asks for your response, and you do not follow up that initial contact, the person will be left feeling let down and not valued. It also means that they may be delayed in meeting their own deadlines and objectives while waiting for you to respond.

People who are not able to respond promptly to client requests will inevitably lose business. We live in a busy era, where telecommunication, travel and information technologies have created impatient consumers and colleagues. No one wants to be kept waiting. If I am looking for a supplier to come and paint my house, I will either ask around or look in the newspaper or yellow pages for an appropriate person. I will select the one who appears the most ideal and call. If they do not respond within half an hour to my call, I will try another and then another. Inevitably the first person who gets back to me is on the front foot and, unless they are ridiculously expensive or rude, they are likely to get the job. Likewise, if I walk into a restaurant and am left standing without being seen to a table within a minute or two, I will walk out and move on to the next restaurant. Meaning my business goes to the person who responds within the timeframes I perceive to be acceptable.

Why is it so easy to slip up in the area of responsiveness?

In contemporary society, our daily lives are hectic – so much so that social commentators have coined the term '*time famine*' to describe the current conditions under which we live. Often we can become so busy that it is easy to forget our commitments, not follow up quickly on enquiries and and forget to send out information that was requested.

Some people lack **organisational skills and systems** to ensure they capture every opportunity to respond. They have good intentions, but no structure to fulfilling those intentions.

Others make **assumptions**. In the example of the restaurant, the room may be very busy, and a table may be getting prepared in the corner. The waiter may assume I can see this is happening and not acknowledge me to assure me that he is aware of my needs and will seat me within the next two minutes. This often happens in business where a third party's input is needed before a service provider can get back to a client with a quote or report. Rather than following up with the client to explain the delay and reassure them they have not been forgotten, the service provider will assume that, of course, the client will know they are working on the report.

A final reason that we can slip up in the area of responsiveness is that we slip into reactivity. What this means is that our focus has shifted from what the other party is trying to communicate, on to

our own thoughts and opinions about what they are communicating. This means we are no longer actively listening to the other party so we decrease our ability to respond and respond appropriately as we have ceased to gather information.

Behaviours or characteristics of someone who is responsive

- They respond to requests and then follow up and follow through
- They communicate, if things are not going as foreseen or planned, so taking account of the other parties needs in terms of being kept in the loop
- They listen attentively and ask questions in order to correctly assess the needs of others so that they can respond appropriately and effectively
- They are careful not to over commit themselves because they know the value of leaving themselves able to respond fully and in a timely manner to things and requests from others that need handling effectively
- They understand the value of responsiveness as a characteristic of a true professional and act in a way that allows them to be consistently responsive

Evaluate your own responsiveness

- Do you have a 'personal responsiveness protocol'? What this means is that you have a set standard of response time that you aim to meet consistently. (It may be to respond to phone calls within one hour and emails within 24 and to always meet commitments to provide information before the due date).
- Call the last ten people you had contact with in business. Tell them you are doing some professional development exercises and would like to know how they found your responsiveness. Ask concrete questions, such as
 - 'The last time I worked for you, how quickly did you hope I would react to your contact?'
 - 'How well did you feel I met your expectations?'
 - If they say you were not as responsive as they would have liked, ask the questions: 'What would have been seen as a good response time on your part?'
 - Follow up with: 'What would I have to do, if we were to repeat the exercise, to exceed your expectations?'
- Keep a record for a 2 week period. For each task you commit to, give yourself a score of 1 to 3 following this guide:
 - 1 = did not respond within my personal responsiveness protocol
 - 2 = met my personal responsiveness protocol
 - 3 = exceeded my personal responsiveness protocol
- Think of someone you know who has exceptional standards of responsiveness. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 10, what would you be)?

- Think of someone you know who has acceptable standards of responsiveness. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 5, what would you be)?
- Think of the least responsive person you have come across. How would you rate yourself in comparison to this person (if they were a 1, what would you be)?
- How often do you jump in to have your say in a conversation before the other party has finished their sentence or finished making their point? And how often is this because you are understanding correctly and how often does it turn out that you are making incorrect assumptions? Responsiveness is highly depending upon active listening – which is very different from hearing and then jumping straight to our internal dialogue. Give yourself a rating from 1 to 5 (1 being not so good and 5 being excellent) in terms of where you feel you sit in terms of the quality of your listening.

Improve your responsiveness

After you have completed your evaluation, if you have noticed some room for improvement, you might like to try some of the following strategies:

- Notice how it makes you feel when others are highly responsive. Notice the specific behaviours that caused you to feel responded to well. Allow this insight to provide you with behavioural guidance, added motivation, and inspiration for you to commit to becoming exceptional in your own responsiveness.
- Write your own personal responsiveness protocol (PRP), and place it somewhere prominent to remind you of your personal commitment to becoming more responsive. Make sure you set a range of standards, such as, acceptable response times for:
 - Emails
 - Phone calls
 - Client enquiries
 - Colleague enquiries
 - Meeting follow up
- Keep a log or notes in your diary that track your success in keeping to your PRP.
- When committing to others to get back to them with further information, products or service, make it a habit to always ask when they would like you to respond back to them. Then, make a reminder note in your schedule to ensure you exceed their expectations.
- When circumstances come between you and your commitments, ensure that you make contact with the other party as quickly as possible and be honest about the reasons for your tardiness. Be genuine and ask for understanding.
- If you work in retail or customer service, make it your habit to, at the very least, make eye contact and acknowledge
- Practise keeping an open mind. It is often through reactivity that we slip up in our responsiveness. Reactivity comes from paying more attention to our internal reaction to

what someone says than to what they are actually trying to communicate and why. So by keeping an open mind and keeping your focus on the other party, you stay in communication and give yourself the maximum chance to respond rather than to react.

Further resources

If you would like to develop further in the area of responsiveness, the following books, courses and consultants may be worth considering. Please note that High Ideals does not endorse or receive any direct benefit from recommending the following resources, the list is simply a suggestive collection of materials that members of the High Ideals management team have found useful in their own development.

- **Fish!** By Lundin, Paul & Christensen – Check out the book, video or workshops
- <http://www.mindtools.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it is an incredible resource to assist people in developing their own professional skills regardless of whether they run their own business or work for someone else.
- <http://www.selfgrowth.com/> is a site High Ideals often refers people to as it offers both personal and professional self-development information and resources. You can type in any search word you want, such as “sustainable decision making” and you’ll get a list of articles, blogs, resources and links to other sites which could assist you in your own development.
- <http://www.high-ideals.com> – Check out the Member Directory section for High Ideals members who offer services which could support you, such as coaching, mentoring or consulting on High Ideals criteria/values.

Author and editor acknowledgement

High Ideals would like to acknowledge and thank Karina Butera for her work on this document. Karina is the Managing Director of High Ideals, a life coach, sociologist and speaker. To find out more about Karina, please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

This document is part of the **High Ideals** Criteria Information Series, edited by Claire Stretch. For more information on Claire please visit her profile on the High Ideals directory by clicking [here](#) and search by name.

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