

Write Down Instructions

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At times I give direction to colleagues about specific steps and actions they need to take. Frequently these instructions are multifaceted and not particularly easy to remember. I've learned over the years that if I watch somebody nod their head yes, they may hear and understand me; but if they fail to take good notes, I know they will not accomplish the task. I tell them that I believe they need to write the instructions down. Even then some folks decline my guidance. Frequently I ask them again to write down the instructions. I may even emphasize my concern by explaining that unless they take good notes during our discussion, I don't believe they will be able to follow through correctly.

A good example in scripture is when the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. God said, "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now." (Jeremiah 36:2, NIV) When we study the book of Jeremiah we begin to understand the extensive instructions God gave to Jeremiah. None of us in our humanness are going to be able to remember such extremely important instructions as outlined in scripture.

When I work with a colleague who writes down the detailed instructions, I can ask them to repeat what they believe they heard to verify that we are on the same page. It confirms the understanding I hope I have achieved.

When someone, like a client, instructs me about something they want me to do; I take detailed notes and highlight the action items that I'm responsible for completing. I repeat what I understand about my responsibility to my client, focusing on my action items. Then, I clearly know what I'm responsible to do as well as my colleague.

I've learned to not be shy about asking somebody to write down specific instructions, even when I know they're reluctant. I would rather deal with a little pushback at the time than see key work go uncompleted in the future because someone failed to take good notes.

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