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Let's Put The Courtesy Back In Communication

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by Hugh Heron

Recently, I called the mayor of a GTA municipality to ask a question. I got his voice message and it said, "Sorry, I am not here, but I will get back to you and that is a PROMISE." When he did – promptly – I was pleasantly surprised. These days, that's the exception rather than the rule, which is sad. It's also counterproductive in business, and with the level of technology we have at our fingertips today, it's easy to keep the lines of communication open and active. In the new home building business, it's critical for us on both sides of coin. In order to carry on the huge job of creating communities, we need efficient dialogue with the municipality that set the policies and procedures for development in their areas, and we also have to be responsible for communicating with our purchasers as their homes are being built.

We are extremely fortunate in Ontario to have an excellent Building Code to help ensure quality, well-built homes, and I know we have a lot of good people working in the government. However, sometimes I think that somewhere along the line, they've misunderstood what their job is. Whatever your position, if you're in your office and the phone rings, answer it. If you're not there and receive voicemails, get back to the callers as quickly as you can. The same goes for emails. This is an important part of your responsibility to your employer and/or your clients, and frankly, it's common courtesy. Neglecting to do so ties the hands of builders and developers who have to wait for a variety of approvals before they can complete the many steps it takes to build communities.

This lack of communication isn't restricted to our industry, either. In fact, poor service seems to be universal today. Imagine being told a service person will be at your home or business sometime within a six- or eight-hour timeframe. These people have schedules and can approximate how long their appointments will be. Of course, the unexpected can happen, but with mobile phones, it would take only a few seconds to call someone on their list and say they're going to be later than expected. We have thousands of road signs along the highway that tell how far a certain town or landmark is. If you know you're going to be late for an appointment, and if you're driving at 60 km an hour and your destination is 10 km away, you can estimate that it'll take you 10 more minutes to get there. A quick call to let a client know you're running late is a courtesy, and most people appreciate honesty.

We love technology today, so why not use it? If a builder calls a municipality, there's a reason. We should be able to phone building departments and get estimated dates of approval within a reasonable amount of time, or if the approval is not granted, find out why. When people don't return calls and emails, it can have a domino effect on things like the closing dates we have issued to purchasers. And in turn, if homes will close after the anticipated dates, it's our responsibility to communicate that to our buyers as early as possible.

Like everyone else who sends an email to or leaves a voicemail, builders expect a response. And yes, it's our responsibility to provide the same with the people who contact us. Communication is more important

than ever before, and we have so many tools today to help us. The most basic is the telephone, and it's the one that I believe is the most neglected.

Again, if the phone rings, answer it. If you pick up voicemails, return the calls. I'll grant you that sometimes it ends up in telephone tag, but make the effort to connect. I look forward to a day when people do that as the rule rather than the exception.

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