

Six Agreements

The Challenge of Assumed Compliance

Fusion White Paper #1

Definition:

A statement about the meaning of a word or phrase, rule or standard of practice. An Explicit Shared Agreement is agreed upon affirmatively by a group of people, memorialized as a written document, (safeguarded in electronic or paper format); agreed upon and signed by those involved, then referenced regularly as the players check back with one another to verify compliance.

*“Happiness is. Happiness is.
Happiness is. Different things
to different people!*

That’s what happiness is!”

Lyrics by Ray Conniff

What’s a corporation? We suggest, nothing more than a series of agreements. The problem of course, is that in many cases, these agreements are, well, fluid...

Sure, the President has a serious contract, and a lawyer with a copy in the safe — just in case. (Although if it comes down to it, that contract may or may not be worth a lot when the parties come to a parting...) But the even more scary aspect of this reality is that with each subsidiary level of the organization, there is more and more disparity between what was once “agreed upon” by the parties — and what is actually taking place every day in the far flung field. And the field is ripe for Freelancing. When it comes to Marketing, the Divisions, the Regions and the entire Field Sales Army, the further away from HQ, the greater the room for Winging It.

The Sales Desk, of course, is recorded — not just for your safety, but for theirs and their employer. Perhaps we’ve gone too far down that road, ‘cause it’s pretty hard to have anything resembling a normal conversation with those guys. There’s that stiff, “Be Careful! Mother’s Listening” aspect to it...

Finding the middle ground while managing that far flung sales team is the challenge! As a leader, you might reasonably expect that if you send your entire field force to school to learn something, they might actually put it into practice... And you’d be wrong. Because although three days is precisely the time required to introduce and teach a new approach, the one day trip back is just long enough revert to the old, comfortable habits. Unfortunately, the time required to fall back can be measured with a stopwatch.

As any General Officer will tell you, the biggest problem with command is “Assumed Compliance.” You give a command, and you assume people will act as ordered... But they don’t.

What they do is partition their daily activity from their experience at training. When they return home, they also tend to return to the old way. When asked about this disparity between what was ordered, and what’s actually happening, the team may be a little sheepish. (Adults and Children often respond the same way.) “You mean NOW? Really? I didn’t think you meant for everyone to do it. I mean, I’m a good guy. I just didn’t think you meant everyone, like right now! I thought you were just trying it out a little...” (Insert sound of head, banging against wall...) It’s not that anyone is purposely disobeying, but their mental state is such that the new information went somewhere outside their day to day activity. Habits are powerful and tend to reemerge after training. What’s required to get beyond Assumed Compliance? Go back to the Title: Six Agreements.



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1st Agreement:

(for the Organization)

A System: “One Story, Many Voices!®”

“We’re convinced that a ‘One Story. Many Voices!’ approach to aligned messaging can make a big difference in our shared success. We’re investing a lot in it and you! We need your full cooperation as we move forward. We’re counting on you to not only learn it, but to support it, practice it, critique and improve it!”

2nd Agreement:

(Story Development Team)

Collaborative Story Development

“After Training, we’re going to invite a group of you (and others from the sales desk, marketing, compliance and management) to come back and collaborate on new stories. You’ll all have representative input on how we look, sound and feel going forward. If you have an idea, bring it to a story session, or send it along. Don’t keep your good stuff to yourself!”

3rd Agreement:

(Sales Force)

You’ve Trained. You’ve Contributed. Step Up and Tell it!

“This is no longer about having a bunch of stalwart presentation pros, but about a Unified Sales Force: ‘One Story, Many Voices!’ You may have been able to ‘Freelance’ in the past, but now, we need for you to deliver the company story in pretty much the same way as your brothers and sisters all over the country, on the desk, on the web and in the literature. Prospects respond favorably when they hear the same story repeated at every point of contact with a company. It may not seem like a big deal from where you sit, but if you let the team down, that’s one less chance for that prospect to hear our story, told our way. Don’t break the chain!”

4th Agreement:

(with Managers)

Agree on Standards / Create Coaches

“We’re training the entire organization. We want that investment to pay off. It falls on you guys to make sure that everyone lines up with the team and demonstrates their newly acquired skills in the field. Accordingly, we’re going to spend some time together as a Management Team to make sure that we all agree about what’s expected, and how you’ll manage and coach them: ‘One Process, Many Coaches!’ So let’s agree on the Standard of Expectation, then, on how we’ll coach it. We’ll put it in writing, and follow up with in-person Standard Field Reviews.”

5th Agreement:

(Sales Force)

Regular Field Coaching

You’ve asked, you’ve trained, you’ve stayed in touch, you’ve accepted and employed feedback on making everything work. Now it’s time to put a “Coach in the Car” and find out what’s actually happening out there. If the Manager rides along for a day or two, there are few places to hide or cover up any freelancing or deviations from the highest standards of practice. (And if every manager is working from the same “Standard of Expectation,” there won’t be so many regional or divisional variations on the National Story.)

6th Agreement:

(Sales Force)

Compensate Compliance

Connect behavior in the field to Compensation. If a certain kind of communication (style, structure, attitude, outcome) is desired, and coached, a bonus for compliance seals the deal.

Getting from Assumed Compliance to Actual Compliance is a long journey. It's one thing to give an order, another thing entirely to assure compliance. There's no insult in following up.

A Note to Skeptics

We've heard it said, 'Hey, our guys are professionals! They'll do what they're told. We don't have to resort to all this coaching, follow-up and reporting — or to extra bonuses — they're already on commission! This is nothing but needless, time-wasting, redundant make-work.'

Well. You may be right... But you'd be the first organization to get it right across the country from the get-go. And by the way, you'd know you were succeeding, how Exactly?

What's a successful Corporation? Nothing but a series of agreements; but explicit shared agreements which are announced, memorialized, regularly referenced, refreshed, coached, and compensated. Then you do it again next year...

Don't just Assume Compliance; demand it, coach to it, verify it, compensate it and recognize it. That's getting
Actual Compliance!

Then, Repeat... for Years!



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