



From Average to
AWESOME
Lessons for Living an Extraordinary Life

Jim Smith, Jr.

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Say What You Mean— and Mean What You Say

Jim Smith Jr.

After helping someone, I always look back to see who else is coming up the hill. There's always someone else who could use your help. I just like to be there, always encouraging and always giving directions. And some of the feedback I'm going to give you is not always going to be what you want to hear.

—DR. FRANK “TICK” COLEMAN, PHILADELPHIA

Can we talk? Be honest! Tell the truth! Level with me!

When people tell you that they are going to call you, and they don't, are you surprised? You're probably more surprised when they *do* call. Simply put, we live and work in a society where people don't mean what they say and don't say what they mean. What's more disappointing is that you've come to accept and expect it.

How many times has someone promised you something and either forgotten about it or come up short? We've all been

disappointed by unfilled promises such as: “I’ll help you move.” “Sure, you need help staining your deck, I’m there.” “I’ll pick you up.” “I’ll be there in five minutes.” We’re still waiting.

Next comes the tired, uninspiring, wishy-washy, pathetic, please-forgive-me, excuse-laden, follow-up conversation that begins with the inevitable “I’m sorry.” Stop making promises you know you’re not going to fulfill. I’d rather you tell me “no” than create false expectations. Otherwise, expressions of intent followed by excuses become predictable and about as useful as an answering machine that has reached its full message capacity or an uncharged cellphone.

Just say what you mean and mean what you say. It’s simple. If you say you’re going to do something, DO IT.

We’ve grown too accustomed to people not coming through for us. People disappoint us more often than Simon tells *American Idol* hopefuls that they sound like a broken karaoke machine. Listen closely and you’ll be able to determine when it’s about to happen again.

*Consider This: Nothing is more confusing
than people who give good advice but
set bad examples.*

Take out your “try” detector. The word “try” gets used more often than a knife and fork at a steakhouse. “Try” has become the universal “get out of jail free” card. It’s the most passive word in our language. The next time someone tells you that he or she is going to *try* to do something for you, run! No, seriously, start thinking about how you’re going to do it by yourself. Would you want an accountant, on April 15, to merely *try* to get your tax return ready for filing and mailing?

A friend recently told me that she never expects things from people; that way, she says, she's never disappointed. Wow, what a sobering way to live one's life! And of late, I've been cosigning that check. People just don't follow through or follow up. I'm not talking about building computers. I'm talking about building relationships.

My inexhaustible friend, Susie Fields, says that commitment and partnership are two of her major everyday practices. "When I take on something, I take it on!" she says. "Commitment is doing what you need to do even when you don't want to. I also create partnerships with people, and I am an amazing support system to those in my network."

During my corporate days, I had managers who promised me promotions but reneged. One of my managers even held up the promotion letter for me to see, only to later say that I was mistaken, that I had misinterpreted what she was saying.

I once had a boss who, when I told her that I was considering posting to another job in the company's Atlanta office, told me not to make a decision until she had the opportunity to speak to the senior vice president and get his thoughts. She said that she really wanted to keep me on her team and that I shouldn't do anything or say anything to the other office until she got back to me. About a week later, I eagerly walked into her office expecting to discover their plans for keeping me on board.

What happened next was as surprising as Mike Tyson biting off a chunk of Evander Holyfield's ear during their championship fight! My manager basically said bon voyage. She wished me well in my new assignment and said that the department really appreciated my contributions. She said the reason she had needed to speak to the senior vice president was to find out if they were going to replace me, and if so, would they do it internally or externally. I stood there motionless, like a child caught drawing pictures on



AWESOME ADVICE

I value integrity. Above all, I always tell people to be true to themselves and to those around them. Honesty *is* the best policy! Honor all your commitments, not just some of them. *Never* break your word! Be straightforward in your dealings with others and you will improve the chances of being treated in kind.

The universe provides the highest degree of support for and the strongest flow of positive energy to those individuals who *value integrity* and *live it* in their daily lives!

—Joe Sparacino, Philadelphia

the living room wall. I know I'm not a rocket scientist, but I'm not stupid! It was time for me to pack my bags. I couldn't get out of her office and out of that company fast enough. It was another corporate karate chop to the neck. I think that I was more angry than hurt this time. I turned down the other job because I wanted to finish grad school at home at Temple, but I resigned from the company four months later.

Professionally and personally, discard the following excuses. "Something unexpected came up." "I lost track of the time." "I couldn't leave. . . . I didn't want to hurt his/her feelings." "I didn't know you needed it so soon." "You weren't clear enough." "I wasn't feeling that well."

Read some books on commitment, accountability, and responsibility. Become focused! Become consistent! Become intentional! Become purposeful! Stop trying! Say what you mean and mean what you say. Your behavior will inspire others to do the same.

Moving from Average to Awesome

This chapter is not only about following through on what you promise. It's also about how significant it is for you to tell the truth—regardless of how the person is going to receive your truth. This exercise will help you move from an average mindset to a more positive and powerful awesome way of living.

First, consider which statement describes how you think about commitment and follow-through:

- **Average:** Though you tell people you're going to try to help them or support them in some task or endeavor, you only occasionally follow through.
- **Awesome:** You either just go ahead and help people with a task or endeavor or you tell them when you're not going to be able to

do it. You understand why you say “yes” when you want to say “no,” and you develop an action plan to change.

Now, take some time and consider the questions below. Respond to the questions and be sure to explain your answers. Finally, rate yourself on your progress. If you are currently average, say so (A). If you feel you deserve an awesome rating, indicate that as well (AW). If you are neither average nor awesome but working toward being awesome, just write W.

Getting to Awesome

Key questions	Your response and explanation	Rating
Do you routinely find yourself doing things for others that you’d rather not do?		
Do you overpromise and underdeliver?		
Who do you have a difficult time saying “no” to? How long has this been the case?		

Rate your progress: average (A), awesome (AW), or working toward awesome (W).