

It Takes a Personal Touch

Sam (not his real name . . . for privacy reasons) told me from the start: just tell me what to do, and I'll do it. His way of saying: I'll be happy to participate in the Healthy Maine Streets- Norway program.

Sam owns and runs a small business in Norway, ME. He has one employee. The nature of the business requires long hours, and his days are often turned upside down or at least sidetracked by unexpected calls from prospective clients or current clients with problems.

Taking him at his word, I dutifully sent him meeting invitations and other communications regarding the start-up activities in the Healthy Maine Streets-Norway program. No response. No participation in meetings. No returned call when I left a message on his phone.

Finally, as the first training event was only two days away, I decided to try one more time. I called his office, and he answered the phone. I said, in my friendliest voice, "Hi Sam, it's Anne." At first, I could hardly get a word in as he apologized several times for not responding and went on to explain that he just couldn't see how he could possibly be involved in the program.

When he finally gave me a chance, I said: "Sam, let me tell you first why I want you to be involved in the program, and then let me tell you why I think it will be possible." I told him how I saw him as a community leader, and how his being part of the program would make others take notice. I mentioned how we needed bright, creative people like him to help us find how to use our implementation funds in ways that would really make a difference. Then I told him I knew how stressful his life was, and that because I valued who he was, I wanted him to be around for a long time, and that meant he needed to take good care of himself. I suggested some of the things he might consider including in his work plan that would be of benefit to him, his employee and potentially his clients as well. And I told him that we would be there to help him at each step, making sure that the process wasn't burdensome.

His response: "I'm sold. I'll be there Friday."

-- Anne Toepker, Norway Healthy Maine Street