Making Better Commitments

Action Guide

Step 1: Craft Clear Requests

Whether you're asking for work or receiving it, clarity is the foundation. A strong request defines the outcome, timeline, and quality expected.

Ask Yourself / Your Team:

- What does "done" look like? (Conditions of Satisfaction)
- When exactly is it due? Include time zone if relevant.
- What evidence shows the work meets the standard?
- Why does this matter? How does it affect the bigger picture?

Example Request:
 "Can you create a one-page onboarding guide (10 questions for Persona A) by Tue 4:00 p.m. ET? I'll accept it when it prints cleanly to one page and aligns with our five brand keywords because it unblocks Wednesday's pilot."

Step 2: Make Sincere Promises

A commitment isn't just "that should be fine". It's an explicit promise you intend to keep. Avoid default yeses.

The Four Valid Responses:

1. **Accept** – I can deliver as requested.
2. **Decline** – I cannot deliver as requested.
3. **Counter-Offer** – Here's a feasible alternative.
4. **Commit-to-Confirm** – I need time to verify before promising.

Check Yourself / Your Team:

- Do you believe this promise is realistic?
- Are you protected from overcommitment?
- Is negotiation possible without risk of punishment?

Step 3: Surface Concerns Early

Commitments fail when risks, capacity limits, or misaligned priorities are ignored.

Ask & Share:

- "What risks are you guarding against?"
- "What would make this promise responsible for you?"
- "What will success look like for you and the team?"

Tip: The earlier concerns are surfaced, the stronger the commitment.

Step 4: Renegotiate Responsibly

Life happens, deadlines, priorities, and facts change. Don't wait until it's too late.

When to Renegotiate:

- New information affects your ability to deliver.
- Dependencies or stakeholders change.
- Outcomes or standards need adjustment.

How:

- Communicate early.
- Offer options, not apologies.
- Update the promise clearly and ensure acknowledgment.

Step 5: Close the Loop

A promise isn't done until it's verified, accepted, or revised. Closing the loop builds trust and learning.

Steps for Closing:

1. Declare completion with evidence.
2. Assess: Was it done as promised?
3. Identify gaps if needed and request repair.
4. Discuss what worked and what could improve for next time.

Leader Tip: Own your part. Poor requests can cause breakdowns, use each loop as a learning moment.

Step 6: Make It Habit

Commitment-based coordination is a practice, not a one-time fix.

Daily Practices:

- Pause before asking or agreeing, clarity over speed.
- Track promises visually or in a shared system.
- Celebrate completed promises publicly to reinforce the standard.
- Encourage feedback loops to refine requests and promises over time.

Quick Checklist (Leader & Employee)

Step	Key Questions	Done?
Request Clearly	Outcome, deadline, evidence, stake?	☐
Promise Sincerely	Realistic? Accept/Decline/Counter/Commit-to-Confirm?	☐
Surface Concerns	Risks, capacity, priorities discussed?	☐
Renegotiate Early	Updates communicated? Options offered?	☐
Close the Loop	Completion declared, evidence assessed, gaps addressed?	☐
Reflect & Improve	Lessons noted for the next commitment?	☐

This guide gives both leaders and employees a practical framework to make, track, and honor commitments, turning messy coordination into a reliable, trust-building engine.