



### **It's Just a Formality** **By Melissa Sayer**

"It's just a formality." We all know the expression. It signifies something that is mundane, trivial or unimportant. Often people will use the term in reference to the written record of a transaction,

whether it is the prospectus for a multi-million stock offering, or the details of your cell-phone contract. Are these details really that unimportant?

I have written before about the importance of the written word in business. Today, I am writing about our perceptions of "formality" in business. Years ago, we had a very strict code of formality in business. Suits were required and carefully formatted business letters were typed on letterhead. Now it is commonplace to conduct business in jeans via text message. That's not a bad thing. But as we shift to a "quick and casual" mode of business, we often abandon a more thoughtful and careful approach. All of the more rigid structures of the past may not be necessary, but some may make good management sense.

I have a client with a small family owned business. Many family members live out of the area and are not directly involved in the day-to-day operations of the business. Nonetheless, each member receives a quarterly financial report, including Profit and Loss Year to Date, performance relative to budget and a written review of the quarter's results and a look ahead at major issues. This takes a fair amount of work for the family member running the business but it makes good business sense. He is not required to send reports and speaks with the other members frequently. But taking the "old school" more formal approach has not only been very good for the family dynamics, but it also forces him to be more objective and accountable for the performance of the business. And ultimately, that makes the business better.

Today's technology makes rapid communication easy. And while that has many great benefits to sales, marketing and customer relationships, there are some things that should not be hurried. There may be times where a more thorough review of an agreement or thoughtful response is warranted. Know when to slow down, and really work through the details. Often, they are more than "just a formality." *Melissa Sayer is a partner with Nordman Cormany Hair & Compton LLP in Oxnard. She lives on a ranch just outside Santa Paula, with her family and their avocados, lemons, goats and chickens.*