Trust and Development of People

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

There are many things leaders need to do to build a culture of high trust. One important concept is to continually develop their people. When people see a pathway to higher capability, their work is more interesting and rewarding, so they become more engaged in it.

In high development organizations, people trust the managers to improve their lot in life by making them more valuable to the organization. They recognize the company's investment in growing them, and they naturally return the favor by applying themselves further to their work.

There is a solid correlation between development of people and the level of trust an organization can achieve with the work force. Development of people also creates low employee turnover because employees are happier. Here is a prime example of the connection.

Wegmans is a grocery chain in the northeast United States that is based in Rochester NY. This private organization has been on the list of top 100 companies to work for in America every year since 1998, often scoring in the top 10, and won the top slot in 2005. I am familiar with this company because I live in Rochester. They have worked for years on developing a culture of high trust. They do this through numerous methods championed by their late founder, Robert Wegman.

One hallmark of Wegmans is that they are fanatical about the development of people. It is not the only underpinning of their culture, but it is an obvious pillar of why they are so successful. People are cross trained, which adds variety and substance to their employment. It also creates bench strength. A side benefit is that the employees themselves become the teachers, which means that they learn their own jobs better as they teach the process to others. As a result, Wegmans has extremely low employee turnover: significantly lower than 10% percent in an industry that normally suffers high turnover of about 40% per year. Colleen Wegman, the current CEO of Wegmans, was

asked how she can afford to do so much training in the low margin grocery business. She replied that the money they save by having lower turnover dwarfs the training costs.

Exercise for you: Take stock of how much development you are doing in your organization. Benchmark companies spend more than $1500 per employee and provide more than 50 hours of training each year. If you are doing less, think about increasing that amount.

Every organization I have seen wants to improve employee satisfaction. Managers work feverously on various techniques aimed at making the workplace a better place for the employees. Not too many organizations recognize that developing people is one of the best and easiest ways to improve employee satisfaction. These groups think of training in terms of a burden: like compliance with mandated safety training. That mindset is counterproductive and simply overlooks a prime method of creating a great culture.

If you are interested in developing more trust in your organization, consider making larger investments in the development of employees. It is one of the hallmarks of an excellent organization.

The preceding was derived from an episode in "Building Trust," a 30 part video series by Bob Whipple "The Trust Ambassador." To view three short (3 minutes each) examples at no cost go to http://www.avanoo.com/first3/517

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