

Building Higher Trust 15 Reinforcement

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



We all know that when leaders and managers reinforce people for doing well, they tend to do more of the good work.

There is an interesting dynamic between reinforcing in a high trust environment versus trying to thank people when there is low trust.

This article will explore the connection between level of trust and the

effectiveness of reinforcement attempts.

When Trust is High

If a culture of high trust has been established by leaders, then when they go to thank people for a job well done, it is normally accepted. The reinforcement has the desired effect, which is to obtain more of the good performance.

Workers see their leader as reliable and sincere with the feeling of gratitude. In those situations, a sincere “thank you” or even some form of tangible reinforcement will work out well. Workers can relate to the sincerity and feel good about it.

When Trust is Low

The opposite is true when trust is low. The reason is that workers are skeptical to begin with, so they see any attempt to reinforce workers as some kind of trick to get even more performance out of them.

The workers view the leaders as insincere with their praise or maybe they think the leaders are slanting the praise too much in favor of one group versus another.

If the leader gives out small trinkets to make workers feel good (for example a sticker or button), the workers are insulted by the trivial nature of the reinforcement.

If the leader heaps on verbal praise, the workers see it as insincere and take some offense at being duped by a bunch of phony gratitude.

The Overview about Reinforcement

Good reinforcement is a powerful positive force in any organization. It helps encourage people to do more of the excellent work. However, it is vital to have a culture of high trust before trying to enhance operations by using reinforcement.

If trust is not sustained, then attempts by management to reinforce workers often backfires. I have even seen instances where well-intended reinforcement does more harm than good.

Bonus video

Here is a [brief video on Trust and Reinforcement](#)

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of four books: 1. The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals (2003), 2. Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online (2006), 3. Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind (2009), and 4. Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change (2014). In addition, he has authored over 1000 articles and videos on various topics in leadership and trust. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations