

Building Higher Trust 17 Table Stakes

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



My model for building Trust starts out with a group of leadership behaviors that I call “Table Stakes.” The name comes from the gambling industry. When you play poker in Las Vegas, you do not get dealt a hand unless you have the “ante” in the pot.

I believe the same kind of thing happens when leaders attempt to build trust. There is a set of behaviors that a leader must practice without fail or there is simply no chance to build trust. They are not even in the game. These behaviors I call “Table Stakes.”

Let’s look at some of the table stakes. Recognize this is only a partial list and that for different industries or different circumstances the table stakes may vary somewhat.

Be Open

A leader must believe in and practice behaviors of open communications. This does not mean absolute transparency, since there are situations where transparency is illegal, immoral, unkind, or just plain dumb. A general tendency to share what is possible to share and not withhold information is required to build trust.

Be Honest

People need to believe in what a leader says to earn their trust. This is why so few politicians garner high trust. Some politicians manufacture “facts” to suit their current purpose. We have become so used to our leaders lying to us, often in the face of ironclad proof, that the collective trust in these leaders is nonexistent.

Without integrity, a leader has no chance to create or maintain trust.

Be Ethical

If a leader does underhanded things to get out of tough spots, then trust will quickly be extinguished. Most people have a good nose to smell out unethical behavior. Once a leader is proven to have done something unethical, it is impossible to generate trust. The leader is locked out of the game.

Honor Commitments

This is to simply not be duplicitous. Leaders who “talk the talk” but don’t “walk the walk” are simply shut out of the trust quest.

Communicate

Some leaders pretend to communicate but really fail to keep their people in the know. They may make a lot of noise or talk a lot, but real communication means getting messages into the hearts of people. Communication is not a head game; it is a gut game.

Be Consistent

Leaders who are unpredictable and inconsistent have little chance to build high trust. People believe these leaders are just playing games with them. They be amused or frightened at times, but real trust will be lacking.

These are just six examples of leader behavior that constitute the table stakes required to build trust. In the next article I will share the second category of behaviors which I call “Enabling Actions.”

Bonus video

Here is a [brief video about Trust and Table Stakes](#)

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