

Building Higher Trust 21 The Role of Leaders

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



In my business, I work with leaders and organizations of all types. I am called upon to help them improve in a number of ways, but the most common request is they want to build higher trust. Most of my writing and all of my speaking is on the topic of trust, and I have become known internationally as “The Trust Ambassador.”

The most common misunderstanding relative to trust involves the leader’s role in creating a culture that is different from what they really want. Leaders rarely see themselves as the root cause of the problems facing their organization. They find ways to blame other people in the organization or circumstances for the lousy culture they want to improve.

Here are just a few examples of how leaders try to deflect their culpability:

1. Our supervisors don’t know how to hold people accountable properly.
2. Managers here don’t follow up on their commitments.
3. The sales people overcommit on delivery times, and we have backorders.
4. The development engineers don’t talk to the production people.
5. The economy is in the tank, and we need to lay off people.
6. Our production workers are lazy and work at a low efficiency.

In nearly every case, once I can examine the situation closely, I find it is the policies and behaviors of the senior-most leaders that are the root cause of problems relative to trust. They are often surprised to find out their role in creating the problems they face. Of course, they push back on me and go back to old excuses they have used in the past.

Eventually, by taking the high road and pointing out the opportunities that are overlooked, I can get most senior leaders to admit they are at least a **part** of the problem. That is a good first step.

The top leaders of any organization have the most influence on the culture. Oh sure, there can be problems or issues at any level, but the senior leaders set the tone of how we treat each other and how we react to challenges.

Leaders need to recognize that they may not control all the things that are happening to the organization, but they do influence the collective attitude to those challenges. I am usually able to get senior leaders to agree to put effort into **changing the way they**

think and act. I do this by reframing the mindset to look for the incredible opportunities that lay in front of the organization if a culture of higher trust can be achieved,

Once we have crossed that bridge, progress comes much faster. I help the leaders understand that the key to building higher trust is to reduce the level of fear. By working to create a culture of psychological safety, leaders begin to reverse the landslide of disastrous conditions like the ones listed above and several hundred other excuses for poor performance.

With that as a foundation, if leaders get the idea that the key is to make people glad when they bring up a contrary thought, that encourages the level of trust to grow. Before long it is easy to more than double the productivity of an organization and the problems that were imagined in the beginning start melting away.

By that time the organization is ticking like a Swiss Watch, and exceptional performance is not only easy, it is a blast. It is up to the leaders to see their continual role as the genesis of culture.

Bonus video

Here is a [brief video on the Leader's Role in Establishing a Culture of Trust](#).

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.