Building Higher Trust 26 Trust and Respect

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD

In my work with leadership teams, I like to ask if trust and respect are independent variables or if they are always linked in some way. Typically I will ask the group two questions:

1. Can you respect someone you don't trust? And.
2. Can you trust someone you don't respect?

Wrestling with these two questions really helps because in order to answer them you have to dive deep into your understanding of what the words respect and trust mean to you.

Respect

My favorite definition of respect is this. If I respect you, I hold you in high esteem and value your opinions greatly. Your stature in my estimation is very high due to some set of circumstances such as credibility, office, longevity, credentials, finances, or other factors that allow me to hold you in high esteem.

Trust

If I trust you, I believe that you will do what you think is in my best interest at all times, even if I don't like it. Trust also means that I see you as being consistent (doing what you say), credible (that you are capable of doing your job well), and of high character (that you operate in a way that is consistent with your values).

There are numerous other definitions we could generate for these two words, but if the above two are close to your thinking, it could lead to a better understanding of whether trust and respect are always present together or if there is a pecking order.

Most of us would agree that trust and respect are typically strongly linked. If we respect someone it easy to trust him or her, and if we really trust someone it means that we respect him or her as well.

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Deeper Analysis

Thinking more acutely, we may be able to pick up a subtle difference that will allow some deeper analysis. I think there is a hierarchy and that trust is a higher level than respect. As evidence of this, I can respect individuals due to their office or their financial situation or some other factor and still not fully trust them to do what is in my best interest. Therefore, I can respect someone that I don't yet fully trust.

However, I cannot come up with an example where I can trust someone who I do not respect. Respect is a precursor to trust; therefore, I believe there is a hierarchy where trust is a higher level than respect.

In most situations at work and in other areas of our life, trust and respect are linked together. But in reality, I believe respect comes first, and trust is earned with deeds, not words, that occur after there is already some level of respect present.

This discussion is a very interesting one to hold with leadership groups because it enables people to delve deeply into their understanding of these words and come up with scenarios that allow greater insight than was previously present.

Both trust and respect are also a function of how we treat other people. To maintain both, we need to be consistent, and kind. When we treat people the right way, it is easier to build and maintain trust and respect.

Bonus video

Here is a brief video of the relationship between Trust and Respect.

B*ob 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.*

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