

## Building Higher Trust 32 Trust Versus Walking on Eggs

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Have you ever been in a situation where you had to choose words carefully, like you were walking on eggs? This is indicative of a low trust situation where communication is tedious at best.

In this hostile environment people are ready to pounce on any opportunity to misinterpret or bend whatever is being presented. You must be hypersensitive to every word and inflection to avoid people misreading your intent. Stephen M.R. Covey describes it this way:

“When the relationship is unified and harmonious, we can almost communicate without words. Where there is high trust and good feelings we don’t have to ‘watch our words’ at all. We can smile or not and still communicate meaning and achieve understanding. When the relationship is not well established, a chapter of words won’t be sufficient to communicate meaning because meanings are not found in words – they are found in people.”

Once you achieve an environment of trust, all forms of communication become easier. Big mistakes are rare because any small communication glitch will be surfaced and dealt with before it becomes an issue. You can relax and be yourself in all your communications.

In areas where trust is high, you can see lots of evidence of it. I always describe it as a backyard in winter. When there are rabbits in the neighborhood, there is ample evidence with tracks in the snow. Groups who have high trust act and react differently from those with lower trust levels. There is an esprit de corps among people. They laugh more and seem to have a great time being together. They struggle with problems just like everyone else, but they climb over them quickly and move on.

The body language in these groups is one of love and support for one another. People will not tolerate backbiting or badmouthing. Respect is on their faces. They volunteer to help each other willingly and go out of their way to be kind. When they describe their improvement programs, they beam with pride.

If you walk into a conference room full of people with high trust, it takes only a few seconds to sense it. People don’t even have to talk. Unfortunately, even in the best

groups, things are not amicable all the time. Occasionally, there will be setbacks and problems to overcome.

A hallmark of a trusting environment is that letdowns don't impact the climate very long. Human beings are fallible. No two people can work in close proximity without one letting the other down eventually.

If an atmosphere of trust has been nurtured, the event will trigger an exchange that is open and honest. "When you were late, I felt bad because it meant I would need to cover for both of us." This is then followed by reinforcement for pointing out the gaff: "I really appreciate that you told me. I didn't realize the impact it was having on you. I'll try to be on time from now on." The bad feelings never get a chance to escalate. In fact, the existence of a gaff only ends up *enhancing* the relationship because it is extinguished so quickly.

In an atmosphere of trust, you get tremendous progress from improvement initiatives because disconnects will quickly surface. This avoids pursuing a mechanical improvement program that lacks support from all constituents.

The suggestions offered here will work, provided there is good consensus among the team. Test for this commitment often, and don't operate in a vacuum.

You can benefit from these ideas as an individual contributor, but you cannot effectively drive them in the organization above you. You need the support of your boss and peers. Frequently, that is a major stumbling block. What you can do is embrace and use these tools *in the environment you control*. Demonstrate their power by example and offer to expand the ideas beyond your current boundaries. If you get pushback, don't pressure people. Instead, just continue to gain the mileage in your area and lead by example.

*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.*

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