

Building Higher Trust 34 First Action to Build Higher Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



What advice do you give others and yourself on how to build higher levels of trust? We all know trust is a key ingredient for any organization to be successful. In these draconian times, many leaders find the ability to build and maintain trust is next to impossible.

There are countless books and articles on leadership. Many of them focus on the area of building trust. Often these writings focus on what a leader needs to **have** in order to build trust.

For example, one author suggests that a leader must have both credibility and character to garner higher trust. I agree with those two elements, but my focus is on helping leaders change what they **do**. If you change what you do, then you change who you are, and you get better results.

Of all the trust building skills leaders possess, the ability to **reinforce candor** is the most powerful and elusive. This is the behavior of making people feel glad when they bring up something a leader has done that they feel is not right. Most leaders find it impossible to reinforce people when they offer a candid critique. Reason: Leaders act from their own paradigm of what is right, so when an employee suggests an action is wrong, they get defensive and push back. This has the effect of punishing the employee for being candid.

By reinforcing candor, leaders create a safe environment where trust grows easily and rapidly. The reason is the psychological safety triggers transparent communication in both directions.

If we can teach leaders to reinforce people when they speak their truth, those leaders will have a giant head start at building trust. It is not rocket science: it is much more important than rocket science.

In my business, I coach leaders every day on how to be more effective. There are a thousand things to think about when trying to lead an organization effectively. These skills range from being consistent to preventing the formation of exclusive cliques or even just how to write an effective e-mail message.

The first skill I work to instill in any leader is the ability to reinforce candor. Why? If leaders gain the ability and humility to accomplish this feat, they will find all the other leadership skills and traits come easily. If they cannot reinforce candor, then the other skills or activities of leadership will be blunted and ineffective because employees cannot trust them with unpleasant truths.

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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