

Building Higher Trust 63 Trust Hallmarks

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP



For several decades I have believed that organizations that show high trust hallmarks outperform weaker organizations by huge margins. While there are hundreds of examples of what high trust looks like, in this brief article I will share five things you will observe in an organization that specializes in high trust.

What people say

One good barometer of trust is to monitor what people are saying to each other in normal conversation. If you just walk around your place of work for a couple of hours and listen to how people talk, you will get a quick view of the level of trust.

Mark an X on a card every time you hear a conversation about pursuing the goals or vision of the group. Mark an O on the card every time you hear a conversation that is basically badmouthing other individuals within the group. If, at the end of your visit, you have more X's than O's, then you are likely witnessing a high trust group. If it is the other way around, then trust is low or totally missing.

How groups deal with challenges

All groups have challenges from time to time. Groups with low trust are stopped in their tracks, because the interpersonal problems make it very difficult to figure out what is wrong. They spend most of the time arguing about what the real problem is. Groups with high trust can resolve challenges quickly and easily because they communicate honestly.

High trust groups deal with the root cause of problems rather than analyzing symptoms. They also frequently come up with more creative solutions to problems, because they are not fearful and are free to explore out-of-the-box ideas.

The level of people development

In high trust environments, the leaders are vitally interested in developing all employees to be the best they can be. High investment of people is a hallmark of high trust groups.

In low trust organizations you can find leaders who are less interested in training people for a few different reasons:

- 1) They are so busy trying to survive that they have no time to devote to training,
- 2) They are afraid if people are well trained they might be overtaken, or
- 3) There is so much apathy that nobody really feels like development would be helpful.

Making ethical decisions

The study of ethics is very interesting because many leaders are convinced they are ethical, yet they find ways to shade things somehow when nobody is looking. They rationalize that bad things should be OK “under these circumstances.”

We see this all the time in scandals that seem to come up like crocuses in the Spring. The important part of being ethical is not what you do when people will see it, but what you do when nobody would know if you were cheating. For example, if you are hiding some expenses to inflate earnings, it shows a corrupt leader.

Exposing hypocrisy

When leaders talk a good game but really do not act in ways that are consistent with the words, there is a falsehood that is obvious to everyone.

One current example that is evident in many companies is they state a value of trusting their employees when they are working remotely, but they use tracking software so they can identify the number of keystrokes made per hour.

People notice the hypocrisy quickly, so the value becomes something we say but not something we back up with actions. We look good on the outside but we are missing integrity underneath.

Conclusion

These are just five of the ways you can witness the hallmarks of trust in an organization. Stay alert and you can add dozens of additional items to my list. Since high trust groups outperform low trust groups every time, make sure your group is operating on the high side always.

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