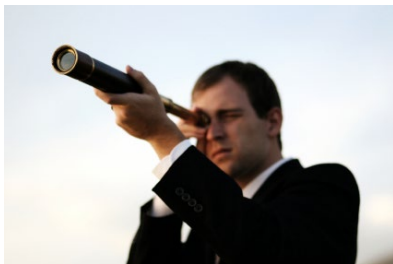


## Leadership Barometer 145 Clear Vision

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



It is a universal vision; every leader would like to obtain higher trust within his or her organization. It stands to reason because trust links directly to the profitability and market value of an organization.

When trust is high, people work together with high productivity toward the vision of the organization. Low trust groups waste time and resources in unproductive bickering and dysfunctional blind alleys.

I see a conundrum in many organizations. Leaders are often unable to see the connection between their own behaviors and the level of trust within their organization. They feel somehow trapped by a system that demands herculean quarterly financial results while having to navigate through oppressive regulations. They try to motivate disinterested employees and keep up with a daily avalanche of information.

It seems impossible to achieve the expected results every quarter when dealing with the realities of leading an organization. Driving productivity is more of a challenge when many employees are working remotely.

The thought of trying to build a culture of high trust while constantly feeling like a gladiator in the lion's den strains credibility. Top leaders try to survive, and that often means taking some actions that appear to compromise the trust. This article shares a way out of the dilemma. I will share that the key to solving the puzzle is already in the hands of the senior leader.

Leaders often cannot see how their actions prevent the very thing that will create a more successful existence for everyone. They are effectively blind to what is causing their problems. If they would change their own behaviors relative to the culture in their organization, things would improve.

Helen Keller said, "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." So how can a leader begin to see more clearly? Here are eight ideas that can improve your vision.

**1. Become a Level 5 Leader** as described by Jim Collins in *Good to Great* (2001). Get some coaching on humility and begin using the "window/mirror" analogy. The leader looks out the window when things are going well, but in the mirror when there are problems. Less trust-building leaders do exactly the reverse. They congratulate themselves when things go well but blame employees or other managers when things go poorly.

**2. Reinforce Candor** - Create a culture where people feel rewarded when they bring up doubts about the wisdom of an action or decision. That culture gives the CEO a new set of eyes to see clearly how his actions may be compromising trust.

**3. Become a mentor** - Seek out several informal leaders in the organization and begin to mentor them. This practice allows the flow of critical information about whether the leader is sending mixed or incorrect signals.

**4. Do more "management by walking around"** – Being more visible may seem awkward at first because the CEO may prefer the isolation of the ivory tower. That is one hallmark of the problem. Too many meetings and private lunches give rise to insulation that renders the top executive insensitive to organizational heat.

**5. Conduct a 360 Degree Leadership Evaluation** - A periodic measure of high-level leadership skills is one way to prevent a top leader from kidding herself. There are numerous instruments to accomplish this. Doing an assessment is important, but taking the data seriously and creating a plan from the information is crucial.

**6. Get a good coach** - Every leader needs a coach to help prevent myopic thinking. Seek out a trusted advisor for a long-term relationship that is candid and challenging. Coaching sessions can be efficient by doing them after hours on the phone or by using online technology.

**7. Develop a leadership study group** - A leader can grow personally in parallel with others. Invest some time studying the inspirational writings of top leadership authors. Benchmark leaders from other organizations. There are literally thousands of resources available that can both inspire and challenge any group. These investments are very low cost.

Many leaders prefer the "lunch and learn" sessions. Some leaders work with a skilled facilitator to keep things on track. Other leaders prefer to proceed on their own without

outside assistance. If face time is impractical due to travel, that does not prevent an online discussion on leadership concepts from literature.

**8. Subscribe to some Leadership LinkedIn Groups** - There are dozens of excellent leadership groups on LinkedIn. These groups have tens of thousands of leaders who can benchmark each other and help resolve typical problems. There are also numerous local and national organizations on leadership development that can provide provocative ideas for growth.

These are just a few ideas that can broaden the view of a top executive. Having a clear vision has the wonderful effect of helping a leader become more effective over time. I believe it is incumbent on all leaders to have a personal development plan. Give it a high priority in terms of effort and budget. Seeking to constantly grow as a leader is truly important. Growing other leaders should be the highest calling for any leader.

Once a leader knows how his behaviors are impacting trust within the entire organization, then conditions start to improve rapidly. People are not playing games with each other, and productivity goes up dramatically. Everyone feels better about the work and the culture, so people feel empowered to go the extra mile. Performance goals are met and exceeded as the whole organization becomes aligned with a new vision. Trust starts with the behaviors of the leader.

Ken Blanchard was asked what gives rise to incredible levels of improved organizational performance. He quipped, "It's always the leader, it's always the leader, it's always the leader" [Ken Blanchard "It's Always The Leader"](#)

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

