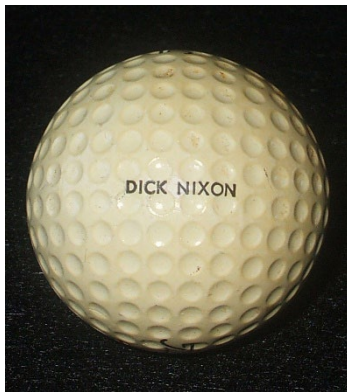


Building Higher Trust 74 Trust and Golf Balls

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



A golf ball is completely different on the inside than it is on the outside. Trust built by leaders has important characteristics inside that may not be obvious from the outside.

For any leader, the aspect of trust in the organization is a foundation for performance. Without trust, groups might look the same on the outside, like a shiny and dimpled golf ball. It is the compressed inner layers that give power and flight characteristics to the ball.

Different Designs

Actually, golf balls come in numerous designs from one-piece (practice) balls to five-piece balls. Each design has different flight characteristics. For example, the two-piece ball has low spin to allow excellent stoppage on the green. Also, the two-piece design minimizes the magnitude of any slice or hook.

Trust also comes in a variety of designs, and you cannot tell how well established the trust is by just looking at the outside. The striking difference between high trust groups and low trust groups occurs on many levels. Let me name a few ways trust impacts how groups operate.

What people say

One good barometer of trust is to monitor what people are saying to each other in normal conversation. Just walk around your place of work for a day 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 group's vision. Mark an O on the card every time you hear a conversation badmouthing other individuals. If at the end of the round, 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, just like cheap "driving range" golf balls.

How groups deal with challenges

All groups have challenges from time to time. Groups with low trust stop in their tracks. Interpersonal problems make it very difficult even to figure out what is wrong.

It is as if a golfer accidentally used the wrong style of golf ball off the tee. The error would be evident from the results.

Groups with high trust can resolve challenges quickly and easily because they communicate honestly. They deal with the root cause of problems rather than get hung up on symptoms. They also have more creative solutions to problems because they are free to explore out-of-the-box ideas. Teams at work have a style of operating that works to produce the highest level of trust.

Golfers find a type of ball they are most comfortable with, based on their swing and strength.

The level of people development

In high trust environments, the leaders are vitally interested in developing employees to be the best they can be. Investment in 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) Leaders are afraid if people are properly trained the leader might be overtaken. 3) There is so much apathy that nobody really feels like development would be helpful.

Not investing in people would be the equivalent of using a cut ball. That is where the cover has been cut to the extent that the core is compromised.

Making ethical decisions

The study of ethics is very interesting because most leaders are convinced they are ethical. Unfortunately, many of them find ways to shade things somehow when nobody is looking.

We see this all the time in scandals that seem to come up too often. The important part of being ethical is not what you do when people will see it. It is what you do when nobody would know that really counts.

Having two sets of books is a good example of an empty shell of a leader. It is like a golfer who is inclined to write a wrong number on his or her scorecard.

For an honest golfer, it is annoying to have another person check that the right score was written. This verification step signals a lack of overall trust, and it can lead to hard feelings.

Exposing hypocrisy

When leaders talk a good game but act differently, there is a falsehood that is obvious to everyone. It is like we all have x-ray vision and can see inside the ball.

One good example of this is when senior leaders have a value like, "People are our most important asset." It sounds really good until you realize that the decisions made rarely reflect that as a reality. People notice the hypocrisy quickly. The value becomes something we say but not something we back up with actions. We may look good on the outside but we are missing an important layer inside.

The analogy here may be kind of wild, but it is an interesting one. We rarely think of what is going on inside as being that important. We sure would notice a difference on the links if we were using incorrectly fabricated golf balls. Likewise, leaders need a firm foundation that is as true under the surface as it appears to observers.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, 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.

