

Building Higher Trust 79 Trust is a Lubricant

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Today in a LinkedIn response, I thought of the analogy that trust is like a lubricant. Although I have studied trust for decades, I did not make the connection until today. Trust acts like a lubricant in that everything works better and runs more smoothly when trust is present.

I am a mechanical engineer by training, and I know how lubrication lowers the coefficient of friction. It allows machines to run better and not overheat. Let's explore this metaphor and see how it applies to our everyday life. Here are six ways trust acts like a lubricant.

1. Trust makes communication work better

When people are at odds with one another, they often do a lot of talking but very little deep listening. As the differences of opinion, become more apparent, the tone and volume become more heated, just like a shaft would sound if the bearing had gone dry. The scraping and screeching will just get worse until the whole mechanism freezes up.

2. Trust smoothes the roughness

People often are not very kind to each other. They can be rather egocentric and usually think about what is best for number one. People become abrasive like rough sandpaper when other people advocate something that would not be optimal for them. Trust helps fill in the low spots and smoothes out the roughness so people can interface with less friction.

3. Trust helps us find win-win solutions

When people have a difference of opinion, they often dig in their heels, knowing that their perspective is the correct one. Trust helps them see that there may be more than one legitimate way to look at an issue. There is an opportunity to invent creative solutions that work better for both parties.

4. Trust keeps the temperature down

A major function of a lubricant is to lower temperature. The reason mechanical parts overheat without oil is that there is no way to dissipate the heat. Oil in a car engine allows the cylinders to continue their momentum without freezing up. Without oil, a car engine would overheat and seize up quickly, thus destroying the engine. With people, trust wicks off the overheating of emotions and allows people to disagree without being disagreeable.

5. Trust polishes relationships

The bond between people will be very strong and supportive when trust is present. Just as lubrication keeps the oxygen away from surfaces that could tarnish or rust, so trust keeps acrimony from destroying the love and affection people have for each other. When trust is high, personal relationships sparkle just like highly polished metal.

6. Trust acts as a preventive

In the stress of everyday pressures, it is easy to become inflamed or at least anxious. Trust is a kind of balm that soothes the nerves and allows people to be calm in stressful situations. Knowing that someone has my back gives me more confidence that all will be well. Like using grease to prevent stored parts from rusting, people can use trust to keep themselves well mentally.

Conclusion

In any organization, if you have high trust, the entire organization is going to run smoothly like a finely crafted machine. The trust provides all of the wonderful properties of a lubricant. Work to develop higher trust within your organization.

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