

Building Higher Trust 89 The Trust Button

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



What if there was a magic “Trust Button” that leaders could hit any time they wanted to increase trust? Ask yourself this question. How many leaders do you know who would use the button if they knew about it? The good news is that the button is available to all leaders, and it is FREE. All it takes is a change in the leader’s behavior to enjoy the benefits of higher trust.

Numerous possible actions

There are hundreds of actions that leaders can do to increase trust. I do an exercise in my seminars. Groups can think up more than 50 things in just a couple minutes of time. I contend that there is just one action that rises above the rest when it comes to creating trust. The reason comes from nearly forty years of studying the phenomenon both as a leader and as a consultant.

The most important enabler of trust

I believe that psychological safety is the magic button to create strong trust. Leaders who understand this concept and how to achieve it have a significant advantage in creating trust. They are also more effective at maintaining and repairing trust. Let’s take a closer look at why this simple concept is so powerful.

Psychological safety is the belief that you won’t be punished for speaking up with ideas, questions, or concerns. Unfortunately, many work cultures do humiliate or punish people who speak up. Psychological safety is very low in these groups and the growth of trust is snuffed out.

Reinforcing Candor

I believe the culture of any organization is established from the top. It is the behaviors of leaders that set the tone for how people are treated. If people who dare to give their candid feelings are punished by the leader, then trust will not grow.

That is why I preach that the trust button is activated when leaders “reinforce candor.” It is easy to understand how this would work Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult for many leaders to accomplish it.

Why Leaders have a difficult time reinforcing candor

Leaders are saying and doing things every day that they believe are right. It is almost impossible to do things that you truly believe are wrong. The leader feels justified in every decision, statement, email or other means of sharing ideas.

If an underling makes a statement that questions the rightness of a decision, the leader will become defensive. In defending the original decision, the leader ultimately punishes the employee. Trust is trashed in the process. If you report to a leader who cannot reinforce candor, you learn to remain silent.

I believe that dynamic is the root cause of why leaders have a hard time pushing the trust button. I teach leaders to modify their behavior to reinforce candor and make people glad they brought it up. Some leaders are able to modify their behavior accordingly in most cases. Those leaders are able to enjoy the benefits of a high-trust organization.

What are the benefits?

If you have a high trust group EVERYTHING works better. Productivity is generally 2-3 times as high as a low trust group. Turnover is very low or zero. People have more fun. The quality of work and engagement of people shoot up.

Conclusion

Try shifting from a culture of fear to one where people are reinforced when they bring up concerns. The difference in performance will amaze you.

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