

Building Higher Trust 90 Trust Improves Communication

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Improved Communication is a common denominator of a culture of high trust.

Have you ever been in a situation where you had to choose words very carefully? It probably felt like you were on a tightrope. This feeling is indicative of a low trust situation where communication is tedious at best.

In this hostile environment, people are ready to pounce on any opportunity to misinterpret or bend whatever you say. You must be hypersensitive to every word and inflection to avoid people misreading your intent. In a virtual situation, it is even more difficult because body language cues are more limited.

The advantage of trust

Once you achieve an environment of trust, all forms of communication become easier. Big mistakes are rare. Any small communication glitch will surface and be dealt with before it becomes an issue. You can relax and be yourself in all your communications.

Imagine the freedom of not having to guard everything you say. In an atmosphere of real trust, people are not coiled like snakes waiting for a false step. If something comes out wrong, people will tell you. You can apologize and know your apology was accepted by their body language.

In areas where trust is high, you can see lots of evidence of it. Groups that have high trust act and react differently from those with lower trust levels. There is an esprit de corps among people. They laugh more and seem to have a great time being together. They sometimes have problems just like everyone else, but they climb over them quickly and move on.

Body Language

The body language in these groups is one of love and support for one another. People will not tolerate backbiting or badmouthing. Respect is on their faces. They volunteer to help each other willingly and go out of their way to be kind.

When they describe their improvement programs, they beam with pride. People are truly engaged in the efforts to improve.

If you walk into a conference room full of people with high trust, it takes only a few seconds to sense it. People don't even have to talk. Goodwill is in the air.

Unfortunately, even in the best groups, things are not amicable all the time. Occasionally, there will be setbacks and problems to overcome. In a culture of high trust, problems can turn into opportunities.

Getting past problems

A hallmark of a trusting environment is that letdowns don't impact the climate very long. Human beings are fallible. No two people can work in close proximity without one letting the other down eventually. Remote work situations are especially susceptible to misunderstandings.

In an atmosphere of high trust, a lapse will trigger a discussion that is open and honest. The exchange will be laced with love rather than doubt or anger. The bad feelings did not have a chance to escalate. The existence of a gaff only ends up enhancing the relationship because you extinguished the problem so quickly.

The flip side

If the atmosphere is one of low trust, everything said will go through a filter of doubt. If a point is misinterpreted, chances are it will lead to rancor. Trying to communicate in low trust is like trying to walk yourself out of quicksand. You can make all the right moves, but the reality is you are going backward.

Improvements are easier

In an atmosphere of high trust, you get tremendous progress from improvement initiatives because any disconnects will quickly surface. This avoids pursuing a mechanical improvement program that lacks support from all constituents.

The suggestions offered here will work, provided there is good consensus among the team. Test for this commitment often and don't operate in a vacuum. This is especially important in a virtual or hybrid situation. Do not let a lack of physical presence destroy the beneficial culture of trust.

Conclusion

Work on a culture of higher trust and openness. People really appreciate the ability to speak their mind and not have to worry about others misinterpreting their intent. The benefits are obvious.

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