

Building Higher Trust 96 The Synapse of Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Trust between people is like a synapse in the body. A synapse is a structure that permits a neuron to pass an electrical signal to another neuron. Think of it as the communication channel between neurons in the body. Without the synapse, all life would cease to exist.

Similarly, the ability to pass trust from one person to another allows the trust to be viable in our lives. The basis is the ability to communicate with each other. Trust is like the glue that holds people together. It can exist at all levels because it is fundamentally a kind of synapse between people.

Trust within an organization

A similar pattern exists within organizations, where trust facilitates interactions between people. Where the synapse does not happen, trust becomes thwarted, and it blocks fruitful interaction. This barren condition is common. It results in people "playing games" with each other in an effort to gain political traction for their own agendas.

I visualize trust as existing in the "white spaces" between thoughts and activities. Trust enables the flow of ideas and concepts in an environment free of fear. That condition is vital to creativity in any group endeavor. One of my favorite sayings is, "The absence of fear is the incubator of trust." Lack of fear isn't the only condition for trust to grow, but I believe it is a necessary precursor.

Many authors and researchers have documented the benefits of trust. For example, Stephen M.R. Covey's book, *The Speed of Trust* makes a good point. He stresses that as trust increases costs go down and things move faster. Dennis and Michelle Reina's book, *Trust and Betrayal*, shares research on the process of healing broken trust relationships. In my own books, I seek to highlight the nature of trust and how to achieve it every day.

Reinforcing candor creates the synapse

The heart of building trust is to create a space where people feel safe. They can share uncomfortable thoughts without fear of retribution. Leaders accomplish this atmosphere when they praise people for being honest and open. It is especially important when the message is difficult to hear. I call this technique, "reinforcing candor," and I believe it is one important way leaders create the synapse. It is all about accurate communication between people.

Candor is not always a pleasant experience, because the truth is sometimes repulsive to behold. Individual differences allow one person to think a situation is acceptable while another individual may see it as intolerable. Revealing an opinion about an issue leaves a person vulnerable. The ability to withstand differences of perspective and still maintain respect is what makes trust so precious. The synapse of real trust is enabled by honesty and candor in communication. In the void between souls, these connections allow a strong bond of mutual care and support.

The synapse requires judgment

Raw candor is not always the best approach. We must apply it with judgment, tact, and care. There are situations where it is wise to avoid blurting out our unvarnished thoughts. Within an organization, our reactions to activities or situations begin as private thoughts. They are not malicious or offensive; they are simply our beliefs. The ability to communicate this information with leaders in a constructive dialog is important.

If we feel stifled out of fear of retribution, then our private information will remain hidden. The organization does not benefit from the information, and we suffer frustration by feeling muted.

When we know it is safe to express our thoughts in a helpful way, it is a different story. Leaders will listen, and we feel more attached to our work. The organization benefits from our viewpoint because of the open communication.

It is up to the leaders to enable this flow of information through the behavior of reinforcing candor. That behavior allows the synapse to occur. Further, it is essential that leaders hear and understand the input and be willing to consider it seriously.

We must teach leaders the power of this fundamental law: without trust, we do not make progress. Candor is the enabler of trust. Leaders need to embrace and reinforce candor as much as possible. It is not easy, as it is much more comfortable to become defensive when facing a contrary opinion. The best leaders make people glad when they bring up difficult discussions. It enables the synapse of trust to flow.

[Type here]

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

[Type here]