

Building Higher Trust 113 The Magic Ingredient

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



I have been studying trust in organizations for over 50 years, and I have found the “magic ingredient.” As a Division Manager in a large manufacturing firm, I studied the impact of trust on performance. After many years of comparing groups within my division, I came to a conclusion.

Trust is the magic ingredient

The success of any group rests most on how much trust there is in it. I observed that high-trust groups were able to tackle difficult tasks and come away successful. In low-trust groups, even simple daily challenges became huge obstacles.

The difference was so stark that I described trust as the **magic ingredient**. Groups that could maintain trust seemed to have a shortcut to success. Other groups where trust was lacking were always struggling to survive.

Trust was a magic ingredient for leaders too

I observed that leaders of high-trust groups found that leadership was a blast. They were allowed to be human beings and make an occasional error. The people would cut these leaders some slack. Basically, leaders of high-trust groups were having more fun.

The other side of the coin contains misery. Leaders of low-trust groups are always miserable because people in the organization are out to get them. I picture the people in low-trust groups to be like coiled snakes ready to strike at the least provocation.

Let’s take a look at some specific functions to enhance the contrast.

Communication

Leaders of low-trust groups had to watch every word. If they did not spin every statement correctly people would misinterpret the message. They had to rehearse every

communication to see if there was any way to get the wrong impression. There were several instances where people heard the leader say what they thought he was going to say. They would hear bad news even if the message was basically good news. Getting to a precise way of communicating was always a chore.

On the flip side, leaders of high-trust groups could relax and be authentic. If something did not sound right, people would ask for more clarity. The leader was not subject to a trust withdrawal.

Conflict

Low-trust groups had to battle inter-group conflict at every turn. That is because the individuals had to continually watch for what other people were trying to do to them. The energy wasted in just trying to keep things civil was staggering.

In high-trust groups, the focus was on what they were trying to accomplish. The group members didn't have to protect their interests, so they were more creative and cooperative with others.

Productivity

Since low-trust groups spent their resources fighting each other; they were less productive. They were always under the gun because they did not get things done efficiently.

My observation of high-trust groups is that they were at least twice as productive as low-trust groups. They were continually receiving praise and gratitude from upper management due to their output. More than sheer output, they made it seem easy because it was for them.

Conclusion

The contrast between high and low trust groups could not be starker. That is why I am writing this series of blogs. I want leaders to know that the element of trust is the **magic ingredient** for any group to be successful.

It is curious that when I look into low-trust situations it is usually the behaviors of the leader that are causing the problem. Let me put it more directly. Most leaders do not recognize that their behaviors are the root cause of the problems that are holding them back. Leaders set the tone for everything that happens in an organization.

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