

## **Building Higher Trust 121 Avoid Flip Flops**

**by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD**



Flip-flops are fine for the beach but not helpful in business. You can build higher trust simply by avoiding flip-flops.

Sometimes it is hard to do that because the conditions around a business are changing all the time. What worked yesterday may not play out well today. This article describes how leaders can operate with the necessary flexibility while avoiding a flip-flop reputation.

A classic flip-flop occurs when a leader institutes a new policy and reverses it at a later date. The policy may also be reinstated as well. That is the classic flip-flop that people don't like.

### **Never try to sell a change without an explanation for why it is necessary**

The common mistake made by many leaders is to assume people understand why a rule needs to change. Before announcing a change, explain why this is a needed reaction to a changing world. Advise leaders to use the words in their explanation. "I want to avoid making a flip-flop so everyone understands why this change is essential. This is not being done on a whim."

### **An example of a Flip Flop**

Suppose there is a policy that we do not publish earning figures by product line. We only give out aggregate figures. Now, suppose some manager believes it is better to show all the detail, so she changes the reporting pattern without a lot of fanfare. After a couple of months, she reverted to the original pattern after some employees wrote nasty questions in the social media. They wanted to know the rationale for changing a long-standing policy on the fly. The manager did a flip-flop, which gives the appearance of hiding something or doing something underhanded.

When people felt they had to go on social media to gripe, that is an indication of low trust, to begin with. If they had questions about why the manager made the original change, they should have gone directly to her.

### **People get weary of too many changes**

Try to keep the number of procedural changes to the bare minimum. When considering making a change to a standard procedure, stop and think about how it will be received. Do not assume most people can figure out the driving force for the change. Be specific and clear, and stress that you want to keep changes to a minimum.

Recognize that some changes will require modification to training programs and onboarding instructions. Try to keep the original intent of the action intact while issuing a modification to how it is accomplished. Showing sensitivity to how people are reacting to a change will help.

## **Summary**

Avoid policy changes where possible and explain the rationale for those you cannot avoid. Also, make sure the new procedure is well established in the culture before considering it done. If you have to change the procedure back to the original, make sure people know why you did it.

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