

Building Higher Trust 126 Try Less Control

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



If you are interested in higher performance, you should try less control. That advice sounds backward, doesn't it? Typically, the reaction when things are not going well is for managers to add more controls.

The effort is to get more people to do what they are supposed to do, so performance will improve. Only one problem: most of the time greater control

translates into ***lower performance***.

Daniel Goleman wrote that when leaders use a coercive style it leads to lower employee motivation. His paper, published in the Harvard Business Review, is entitled [Leadership that Gets Results](#).

Evidence from the pandemic

We saw ample evidence during the COVID Crisis when people were working remotely. Organizations put in tracking systems to ensure employees were working. The resulting loss in motivation gave rise to the great resignation of 2021.

If you find ways to check up on your workers, they find ways to cheat the system or leave.

Controls demonstrate a lack of trust

Management sends a signal that they do not trust people to do the right thing. When managers heap more rules onto the already steaming pile of procedures, people become more disillusioned. They also feel abused and even harassed.

Result: people comply begrudgingly, but will not go beyond simple compliance. The organization suffers as workers leave most of their discretionary effort on the front steps or at home.

Example from Stephen M.R. Covey

His new book, *Trust and Inspire*, has a lot of information on control. Covey points out that, in the post-pandemic world, the philosophy of command and control no longer works. People become insulted and reduce their level of engagement.

Don't just throw away all procedures. Some of them are needed for legal purposes or to ensure standard practices in complex and critical situations. Managers should stop trying to account for every situation that might go wrong. They should stop trying to direct people on how to react to every single scenario. Doing that chokes out the creativity and enthusiasm of the workforce.

The secret is to have specific processes only where they are needed. Allow people to use their brains when an off-standard condition requires quick thinking. For example, there may be a set procedure for investigating the situation before granting a customer refund. There will be times when it is wiser to ignore the rule and immediately accept the customer's word.

Conclusion

When managers allow people to use their God-given intelligence, they nearly always do the right thing. If they make a mistake, it is usually a small one. Don't make up rules that try to cover every possible situation. What you get is simple compliance. Most of the time you will miss the opportunity to have a fully engaged workforce.

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