

Building Higher Trust 129 Favoritism

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



When leaders practice favoritism, it usually lowers trust. This article is about the relationship between the two concepts.

I believe that it is the perception of favoritism that does the most damage. Leaders need to be aware of the perception they are giving. Many of them are unaware of the damage they are doing.

Shining a light on favoritism

In a prior article several months ago, I shared some information on playing favorites. The title of the article was [Leadership Barometer 181 Avoid Playing Favorites](#). I gave four specific actions a leader can take to reduce the problem. In this article, I want to explore the mindsets that can prevent the appearance of favoritism.

Why it is always negative

The word, favoritism, has a negative connotation in any context. It is particularly difficult when leaders practice favoritism. When one person is favored over others in an organization it creates jealousy that often leads to conflict. The concept works against equity and fairness. Leaders who appear to practice favoritism are considered weak or clueless by the people they lead.

It is ubiquitous

The problem is that all human beings have some people they favor more than others. It is human nature, and none of us can avoid it in some form. We are all guilty of practicing favoritism at some point. How can we avoid the stigma that goes along with this common behavior? Here are some ideas that can help.

Recognize when you are doing it

Whenever you are repeating the same resource to do a job or perform a function, other people will notice. You need to be aware that you are doing it so you can make a conscious effort to consider an alternative. If there is some kind of credential that the person you select has that others do not, so state. Do not assume that people will figure out why you habitually go with one individual.

Consider a different approach

If you are a leader, take the opportunity to reduce the appearance of favoritism in your decisions. Think about the following actions that can make your decisions appear to be more equitable.

Establish clear criteria for assignments.

Avoid favoring certain individuals based on personal biases.

Encourage open communication about any concerns.

Base decisions on merit.

Distribute rewards and opportunities fairly.

Document and communicate decisions.

Rotate responsibilities and opportunities.

Offer a variety of opportunities for growth and development to all team members.

Involve other leaders or managers to provide diverse viewpoints and minimize the perception of bias.

Lead by example: Demonstrate fairness and impartiality in your own behavior.

Avoid engaging in conversations or actions that may give the impression of favoritism.

Model the behavior you expect from your team members.

Provide feedback and coaching: Offer constructive feedback and guidance to all team members.

Remember, building a reputation for fairness and objectivity takes time and consistent effort. By following these strategies, you can reduce the perception of playing favorites and create a more inclusive and productive work environment.

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