



Trust in the Workplace

Hal Johnson

Considering all that has taken place in corporate governance over the past five years or so, it is no surprise that “trust” has taken center stage in current leadership business writing. You will be hearing, and seeing, a lot about a new book that is currently having high impact in leadership circles. The author is the son of Stephen Covey, who penned *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*. His son, Stephen M. R. Covey, has written *The Speed of Trust* which spotlights the importance of trust in all our human endeavors.

There is one thing that we have in common in every individual relationship, family, team, organization or economy. It's that one thing that if removed will destroy the most robust leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest, caring relationship.

On the other hand, if developed and leveraged, that one thing has the potential to open the portals of incredible success in all aspects of life. Yes, young Mr. Covey convincingly documents that the one thing is *trust*.

His book explains that trust means *confidence*. The opposite of trust – distrust – is *suspicion*. The difference in a low-trust business culture and one with high-trust is most remarkable. In our firm's practice of business transition planning, we see all sorts of manifestations of trust and/or the lack thereof. And, yes, we can bear witness to the impact of either condition.

With trust in good supply, relationships thrive and so does the pace of decision making and work accomplishment. Suspicion, found when trust has not been developed, or has undergone grievous treatment, really slows everything down. Parties have to process every transaction in terms of intent and impact. “What does he really mean? Will he really get that done? Is my back safe? What will be said while I'm out of the office? All these type of questions cycle and recycle through the day-to-day business interactions, creating a highly effective barrier to effectiveness.

Trust supports good economics. Covey relates the story about the business transaction involving Warren Buffet completing the acquisition of McLane Distribution from Wal-Mart on the basis of a two-hour meeting. Because of high trust between the two parties, the merger took less than a month and avoided the usual lengthy process, involving months and millions, for due diligence and attorneys.

How do we bring this down to our level – applying this in our business culture? Aside from jumping up, running out and buying the book, and reading it this week-end (which I highly recommend) take a look at the following behaviors Covey identifies as “trust builders.” A good project for developing trust in your environment is to ask yourself, and possibly your colleagues and associate, how you/your organization are doing in each of these behaviors. This is high impact stuff!

1. Talk straight; communicate clearly so you won't be misunderstood.
2. Demonstrate respect; genuinely demonstrate kindness and civility.
3. Create transparency; be real and tell the truth in a way it is verifiable.
4. Right wrongs; make restitution instead of just apologizing.
5. Show loyalty; give credit to others and speak about people as though they are present.
6. Deliver results; this is a way to convert cynics and establish trust in a new relationship.
7. Get better; continuously improve by learning, growing and renewing yourself.
8. Confront reality; take the tough issues head-on.
9. Clarify expectations; create shared vision and agreement up front.
10. Practice accountability; hold yourself and others accountable.
11. Listen first; genuinely understand another persons thoughts and feelings.
12. Keep commitments; this is the quickest way to build trust in any relationship.
13. Extend trust; extending trust leverages it to create reciprocity.

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