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WHITE PAPER

Being Trustworthy Does Not Build Trust

It's Behavior that Builds Trust

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THE BEHAVIORS THAT BUILD TRUST

Why do people make jokes about used car salesmen? What made you decide on your choice of a family doctor? What distinguished your financial planner from all others? Why do you (or don't you) enjoy working for your organization?

Diverse questions, to be sure, with many answers. But one commonality always shows up as people answer those questions. The commonality is trust, or lack of it.

Trust is expressed in different ways:

"He seemed genuinely interested in helping". "He was there when I needed him". "She's the kind of person you can count on". "Around here, they make you feel like part of a team". "If he says he'll do it, it's as good as done".

Or the opposite:

"He only seemed interested in what he'd get out of it". "I got the impression he was thinking about something else when I was talking to him". "That's her promise this week. She'll have an excuse next week". "Around here, you're on your own. Nobody cares whether you succeed or fail".

Trust is the foundation of all relationships:

People want to work for organizations and managers they can trust. People buy from the companies and from salespeople whom they trust. They may not say it that way, but that's what they do.

So how do you build relationships based on trust? Does it come naturally with some people and not with others?

Professional leaders, like professional athletes, don't rely on the skills that "come naturally".

Instead, they do two things. They analyze their behavior to find out what's working for them and what isn't, and then they practice until they are so accustomed to doing the right thing that in real life situations, they instinctively do the right thing. In other words, to say

something “comes naturally” means that we have learned what works and then practiced it enough so that it feels familiar.

To understand the behaviors that build trust, we will analyze what the successful person does to build trust in client and employee relationships and then practice it until it becomes familiar.

There are four behaviors that combine to create trust in what we say and do. Not our feelings or our intentions, only our actions. People trust you because of what you do. They don’t know about your feelings, your sincerity, or your good intentions. They only know what you do.

ACCEPTANCE

The first behavior that builds trust is acceptance, and yet it is often the least obvious. All people want to be accepted and respected for who they are. Not judged, criticized or made to feel inferior. And you know from your own experience that when you are judged, you stop trusting.

It is easy for a leader to come across as superior. They have the position, they have the knowledge and experience, know the company, know what can and can’t be done. It is easy to give the impression to others that they are slightly stupid or inadequate for not understanding as much about the company, department, or project as the leader does. Sometimes people unintentionally make others feel “put down” by using technical jargon or an obscure reference that they are not familiar with.

Accept others for who they are – young or old, the most intelligent or the hardworking not-so-intelligent, tall or short, good looking or plain. Treat other people with respect every time you deal with them. It’s up to you to let them know when you are with them that they are the most important person in the world at that moment by giving them your full attention.

We’re not suggesting that you should accept poor performance. What we are saying is separate the performance from the person

and accept other people as they are and for who they are. The respect you will gain from them will make it much easier to discuss performance issues.

OPENNESS

The second behavior that builds trust is openness. People tend to co-operate best with leaders who will "level" with them and give them the whole story (even though some of the details may be a bit unpleasant), and who don't hide anything.

The CEO of a large, successful company keeps this saying printed on a plaque behind his desk: "I can take good news or bad news, but I can't take surprises."

If you discover there has been a change of plans that affects other people, or you are displeased with the work results, your team should be the first to know. If there has been a delay in a transaction, your client should be the first to know. They will respect and trust you more for your openness. You'll be the kind of person that is known as honest and straightforward and people will want to work with you.

But there's more to openness than telling people what's on your mind – it's also about being open to what others have to say. Openness is a two-way street. Show interest in other's ideas and opinions. Listen to what they have to say, then check in with them to ensure you understood them correctly.

CONGRUENCE

The third behavior is congruence, the knowledge that what you say and do is on track with what you believe, what you know to be true.

Congruence is different to reliability. Reliability means following-up and seeing through the promises and commitments you make. It means "I'll do what I say I'll do." Congruence means saying and doing what you believe, being honest and saying what is true even if it is unpleasant and not exactly what you think the other person wants to hear.

Most people have no intention to be deceitful. But sometimes, in an attempt to avoid hurting another's feelings, or to be politically correct, a person will sugar-coat the pill that he or she wants someone else to swallow. You can be so sensitive of other's feelings that the real message is not fully communicated. It is not done out of malice, but out of consideration for the other person.

But in the long run it doesn't work. Even if you are temporarily able to smooth over a rough situation, or take the pain out of an unpleasant encounter, sooner or later, a lack of congruence catches up with you, and trust will be diminished or destroyed.

RELIABILITY

The fourth behavior that builds trust is reliability. This is the most obvious trust building behavior in the business world. Organizations rely on their employees to do their jobs well so the company can be successful. People rely on the products and services they buy to do what the company said they would do.

People you relate to want to know that you do what you say you will do. It is hard to have confidence in people who make promises they don't keep. And yes, sometimes things fall through the cracks and you miss a deadline or find that you have overcommitted yourself.

That's why the other behaviors are equally as important – be open and let people know what's going on. If you have strong trust relationships, people will be more accepting of you, and give you another chance.

But don't take advantage of that. The bottom-line is don't make promises you can't keep, even if you think it will get the job done for you now, or appease in an angry situation. In the long run it will hurt you. Do what you say you will do, and if you can't or won't do it, don't say you will.

CONCLUSION

Take these four behaviors - acceptance, openness, congruence and reliability, - and apply them to your work and personal relationships. You'll soon find that you are the kind of person people want to work with and live with!

You'll find that more and more people will seek you out, because all people want to be associated with a person who is accepting, open, congruent and reliable.

The important fact is that three of the four aren't enough. In order to build lasting, on-going relationships, all four are necessary. It can take time to build the trust of other people and, unfortunately, takes only an instant to be destroyed.

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