

THE ELEMENTS OF TRUST

Good leaders build relationships based on trust. How do they do it? 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 the action situation they instinctively do the right thing. In other words, to say a thing "comes naturally" means that we have learned what works and then practiced it enough so that it feels familiar.

That's what we'll do here 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 elements that combine to create trust in what we say and do. Not our feelings or our intentions, but only our actions. People trust you only because of what you do. That's all they know about you. They don't know about your feelings, your sincerity, or your good intentions. They only know what you do.

RELIABILITY

The first element of trust is reliability. People you relate to want to know if you do what you say you will do. It is pretty hard to have confidence in people who make promises they don't keep.

The automobile business is a case in point. For many years there were many dealers and dealer salespeople who gave the industry a bad name by not being reliable, not standing behind their verbal claims. Things have changed, but it's taking a long time to build back the trust that was lost industry-wide. That's why we still have so many jokes about used-car salesmen.

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.

That's the first element of trust: **reliability**.



CONGRUENCE

The second 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 sugarcoat 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, and trust will be diminished or destroyed.

ACCEPTANCE

The third element is acceptance. All people want to be accepted and respected for who they are. Not judged, criticized or made to feel inferior.

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. You're not judging or criticizing them, you're accepting other people as they are and for who they are.

OPENNESS

The fourth and final element of 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 president of a large, successful company keeps this saying in 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.

Besides, if you openly tell the people you work with about how you feel, what you think and believe, what you consider priorities, you'll be more believable. People work better with people they trust.

CONCLUSION

Take these four elements - reliability, congruence, acceptance, and openness - and apply them to your work. You'll soon find that you are the kind of person more and more people want to work 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 reliable, open, accepting and congruent.

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

Keith Ayers

© Keith Ayers 2009

