



That Touchy-Feely Thing Called Trust

Our headlines (Washington Post) read: "Greenspan "shocked" at credit system breakdown" – "US foreclosure filings up 71 percent in 3Q, Financial Crisis Fallout" – "The Road to a Bailout They Don't Deserve" – "The credit crisis. The lurching stock market. The housing bust. The diving dollar. The Freddie and Fannie turmoil. How to make sense of it all?"

Well, how do we make sense of it all? For me it boils down to a breakdown in trust. We no longer trust our political and economic systems, our leaders or the "experts" that inform our decisions. At a deeper level these massive breakdowns are about trust and mistrust in our leaders, their communications with the people and in the system. Just 26% of Americans are satisfied with the way the nation is being governed. Public trust in the executive branch, the legislative branch, and the federal government's ability to handle domestic problems are at or near record lows (Gallup). What are you doing in your organization about the deeper conversation, the one behind the breakdown, the trust conversation?

I will admit to having clients occasionally call my work "touchy feely stuff". I also chuckle to myself knowing that unless we engage these things they call "touchy-feely" in ourselves and in others no relationship foundation will be strong enough to weather the inevitable conflicts that arise. Think about this – who populates organizations, teams, departments, families? Humans do. There is no escaping our humanity and all that it brings with it. Relationships are at the center of business success and trust is the foundation upon which relationships thrive. It is through trusting relationships that individuals connect to support one another in their common work purpose. To truly understand one another, open and honest communication is essential. This type of communication reinforces *noble intent*, knowing that what is being shared comes from a place of mutual trust and a commitment to a goal or purpose.

High performing teams often mention trust and mutual respect as factors in their success. Trust is a key factor in employee engagement, recruitment and retention. A 2006 Gallup report found that "business units with actively disengaged workers experience 30 - 50 % more turnover than those with engaged employees and those employees annually miss more work". Managers and team leaders who build trust will not micro-manage or control their staff. They will delegate clearly and effectively, they will provide support and encouragement and they will set clear agreements about their work trusting that with the freedom to do their jobs well comes the accountability that it is accomplished as required. They will also support their team when mistakes are made or advocacy is needed. "People leave managers not companies," write the authors Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman in *First Break All the Rules*. Many of us can confirm that this has been true for us.

I read a poignant quote by Bill Watkins, CEO of Seagate Technology in a Fortune online article that brought this point home. He said, "I learned a lesson a long time ago in the Army. Nobody really wants to die for their god. No one wants to die for

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their country. Absolutely no one wants to die for money. But people put their lives on the line for the respect of their platoon mates...Why do people run up the beach at Normandy? Misinformation. And because you will not let down your teammate."

Innovation relies on trust; the ability to express one's creativity and ideas without fear of condemnation and with the belief that their ideas will be heard and considered. This acceptance of diverse perspectives combined with respect for one another leads team members to greater learning, and for the business, greater innovation and creative solutions.

Trust is fragile. With competing commitments pulling on managers and leaders, it is important to "walk the talk" and to follow through on agreements and promises. Trust is not given to leaders; it is earned. Leaders should never assume that trust is bestowed because of position or that trust can be mandated. Before people will follow a leader's vision they must trust their leader. One survey by The Discovery Group reported that 52 percent of employees don't believe the information they receive from senior management (Katcher, 2004). A survey of the U.S. workforce found that one in six workers said they have withheld a suggestion about improving work efficiency, and fewer than 40% trust their company to keep its promises (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1994).

When times are challenging and fear is pervasive it becomes imperative that leaders engage their relationships – clients, customers, employees, shareholders – from a place of integrity and transparency.

Trust is essential to the growth and success of your business. The key components for building and retaining trust seem simple but can be challenging too.

- ☞ Modeling and encouraging respect for one another – listen to others, get curious about their values, ask for their best thinking
- ☞ Being honest especially with difficult messages and circumstances
- ☞ Courageous authenticity – doing the right thing despite personal risk
- ☞ Integrity or walking your talk – nothing destroys trust like saying one thing and doing another
- ☞ Sharing information, knowledge and mentoring – developing others builds trust across the organization
- ☞ Focus on a common purpose and shared values
- ☞ Acknowledging and healing a breach of trust – inevitable conflict will arise but being open about healing any real or perceived breach of trust then moving on will keep resentment from building and destroying trust
- ☞ Seek to learn not to blame – when things go wrong or mistakes are made, a better question to ask is what happened not who did it.

And yes, trust is hidden in the bottom line too. A recent study showed that in organizations where front-line workers trust senior leadership, they posted a 42% higher rate of return than those organizations where distrust was the norm. Another study found that trust was by far the number one determinant of employee satisfaction. Teams that trust one another work together more effectively and that leads to increased productivity and innovation.

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So if you think all this “touchy feely” stuff is the same as singing Kumbaya around the campfire, think again. The soft stuff is a misnomer – that’s where the real work lies!

Can I get a hug now?

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(To download a quick and easy assessment tool on Trust and Your Team visit <http://www.sophia-associates.com/trustassessment.pdf>)

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