TRUST

The Glue and the Soul of any Enterprise

By Jaime Jusidman

Trust is a simple word that can change the course of a person's life, a marriage, a family, a friendship, a team, a company, a nation and the world as we know it.

What is it? What does it mean when we use the word *trust*? What does it mean to be trustworthy? A simple but compelling definition of trust is: the placing of confidence in someone or in their good qualities; especially fairness, truth, honor and integrity.

Obviously, nobody is entitled to be trusted. Trust is a gift that is given by another and usually must be earned. Building and sustaining a trusting relationship requires valuing the relationship, clear communication, and a great amount of effort. Trust is hard to sustain and very easy to lose.

At the workplace, trust is a key ingredient that enables organizations to achieve success. It is the glue that holds the organization together and the soul that gives meaning to the enterprise. You must have trust in your coworkers, your boss, your peers, Senior Management, and products and services you provide. For the company, trust is based on consistency between its vision, mission and values its promises to its stakeholders' and its contributions to society; versus its actual behaviors, decisions and actions. Some recent examples of how inconsistency diminishes the public trust towards a brand or institution: Goldman Sachs, Toyota, Enron and Tyco International. They all espoused commitment to high quality, strong customer focus, and ethics before profits. As my colleague, Rick Gilbert, wrote in our last white paper entitled

"Why Integrity Matters," their actions and decisions were driven by an implicit operational value of "win at all costs", which was fundamentally inconsistent with their explicit values, resulting in a catastrophic outcome for both their brand credibility and their leaders' trustworthiness.

When we engage with people in the workplace there is a certain level of initial cautiousness; this is the normal process for gathering enough information to judge the individual's degree of integrity. With consistently positive interactions, we build that foundation of trust. The time it takes to trust someone is impacted by a number of factors: the stakes at hand, the individuals existing reputation, the history of trust or distrust between the two individuals, and each person's own life experiences. We all know the feeling of betrayal and we can understand the reluctance or skepticism that sometimes we experience or encounter with others in our attempts to build a trusting relationship. On the other hand, we also know the how good it feels to have relationships that are transparent and open. When the other person behaves in an ethical and consistent manner with their words they show integrity and make us feel safe; and in return, we give them the gift of trust.

There are two types of trust that occur in the workplace:

1.   Transactional/task trust. This refers to the trust we give others in order to perform a task or a transaction, and it is based on the level of competence that is assumed to exist in the recipient of the trust. This competence is assumed based on prior positive experience with this person delivering consistent positive results. We also tend to give this kind of trust to "experts", who are licensed or trained in a given area of expertise, or to individuals who represent a trusted brand; for example, you would trust a representative from *Berkshire Hathaway* with financial services. In this type of trust, the stakes are typically quantifiable and time-bound. There is an expected deliverable and there are future transactions at stake.

A simple example: I just recently had a slab leak in my house. I called a plumber who was referred to me by my insurance company; he had credentials that identified him as a state licensed certified plumber with years of expertise, and he was referred to me by a trusted brand, my home insurance company. He demonstrated integrity by fixing the leak in a timely manner, performing high quality work and adhering to the predetermined price. I was very satisfied with the outcome of the transaction; thus, he was transactional trustworthy. When pervasive through the organization, transactional/ task trust, fosters efficiency and credibility, and provides a solid platform for the second and more complex type of workplace trust.

2.   Psychological Trust. - This is one of the most precious gifts someone can give to another person and it is at the core of all meaningful human interactions. When exploring this level of trust, the emotional stakes and vulnerability are very high; the level of cautiousness is at its maximum. This kind of trust requires balanced reciprocity where both parties give each other the gift of trust and share the same level of intimacy and vulnerability. When this trust is broken or betrayed, the disappointment and pain may turn into cynicism, defensiveness, stoicism, violence, revenge and an array of behaviors that expose the worst of human nature. However, the risk is necessary; a healthy level of psychological trust is critical in the workplace in order to build effective partnerships, teams and create the levels of engagement between associates and the organization needed to achieve greater results, effectiveness, emotional and market sustainability.

It behooves leaders to assess the level of psychological trust in their organizational culture, as well as provide the processes for achieving transparency, rebuilding relationships, amending perceived betrayals, clarifying misunderstandings, and extinguishing ill intended or misinformed gossip. Furthermore, leaders must act as role models and guardians of integrity across their organizations in order to restore, maintain or foster the culture of trust that is the glue and soul for healthy, productive and engaged organizations.

Take a few moments to reflect on how you model transparency in your organization, how you discourage critical or judgmental statements among individuals and encourage positive inquiry. As a leader, how do you maintain consistency between what you say you value (espoused values) and your actual behaviors both in the organization and in your personal life? If any of these reflective questions trigger a question mark in our mind, I encourage you to gain a better understanding by getting the feedback from others that are willing and courageous enough to give it to you with integrity.

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