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Trust

From the Editor

Here's the scene. Stratford, a couple of weeks ago, a warm day. And since this is theatre — where the line between reality and play become blurred — it's hard to tell whether it's 2001 or 1597. We are in a room in Portia's house, early in Scene II of the *Merchant of Venice* when Portia says,

If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches and poor men's cottages princes' palaces.

So true. It is easy to know what to do; it isn't so easy to do. All kinds of barriers can get in the way — from those that we imagine and create for ourselves to complex organizational realities.

At LIVE Consultants Inc., we don't think we've done our job as educators until we have helped learners think through and deal with both the internal and external barriers that get in the way of doing.

Marilyn Baetz, editor

About the Author and the Article

Life has echoes that travel across time.

"Why don't you trust me?" pleads the teenager, the young adult, a colleague.

In this article, Stephen Baetz argues that trust must be ... well, here's what he says, "Most of us have moved past the point that anyone should be trusted just because they have membership in the human race. Trust has to be earned."

As leaders, workers, partners, and parents we should figure out what we need to do to be seen as trustworthy. Stephen offers five suggestions.

Stephen is a principal of LIVE Consultants Inc., the organization that sponsors this publication.



Stephen Baetz

In Whom We Trust

There are times when I can feel absolutely sure about something; there's no doubt, no second-guessing. And then seemingly without notice, I'm not sure. I'm questioning. Alternatively, I can be sure about a part but not the whole.

That's the way it is with me and leadership. I know that leaders must be trusted or others won't follow. An ability to create trust is the bedrock of leadership. That's the part I'm sure about. The part I'm not sure about? Exactly what trust is.

Odd perhaps. *Trust* is such a common word, a familiar word, an everyday word. It feels like I should know what it means by the sheer volume of usage.

"I trust that's true."

"She is in a position of trust."

"I trust he knows what he is doing."

"You can trust him with your life."

It's about dependability, reliability, consistency, steadfastness, loyalty. It has to do with feeling safe.

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person; having neither to weigh thoughts nor to measure words but to pour them all out, just as it is, chaff and grain together, knowing that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keeping what is worth keeping, and then, with the breath of kindness, blow the rest away. George Eliot

Trust appears to be partnered with openness. Or is it? Perhaps openness is the key that unlocks trust's world.

Coincidentally — or perhaps not so — trust is sandwiched between true and truth in the dictionary and in that place seems to declare that trust is about honesty.

For me, its absence is easier to see than it is to define. When trust is not present, caution escalates, less is shared, and apprehension increases as people act to protect themselves. Water-cooler conversations caution people to keep their distance. Everything is viewed cynically and it is assumed there are hidden agendas. Agreements can't be built; decisions are stalled.

Imagine if leaders couldn't be trusted.

Honest, straightforward communication would grind to a halt because team members couldn't depend on how the exchange was going to be used. Commitment would decrease as people fretted about what the real truth might be. All dialogue would be dissected in an effort to find the real meaning.

Character may almost be the most effective means of persuasion. Albert Einstein

Trust is at the heart of a leader's moral strength. It encourages others to follow.

So we may know what trust is by its absence and we may appreciate what it is capable of doing — even if we can't craft a precise definition.

For sure, it is impossible to order someone to trust you and pleading doesn't work either. Most of us have moved past the point that anyone should be trusted just because they have membership in the human race. Trust has to be earned.

What does a leader do to earn the trust of others? Indeed what does any person do to be seen as trustworthy?

Act with Integrity

Those who are trusted, do what they say they are going to do. They make a promise and keep the promise, even when it is inconvenient for them to do so. By doing this, you know that their word is their bond; they're dependable. There are no mixed messages where they say one thing but do something else. They are true.

Care About Others

The trustworthy individual has an ability to see beyond their own needs to the needs of others. They are interested in what other people have to say, what other people are facing, what other people require, and what other people know. Those we trust are not purely self-interested, looking out solely for what they have to gain or lose; they have a remarkable ability to balance

their needs with the needs of others. And by doing so, they build trust.

We tread a wide path around individuals who only look after themselves, fearing that their self-interested decisions and actions will disadvantage us.

Be Skilful

I find that I am likely to trust those individuals who know what they are doing *and* who know why they are doing what they are doing. I would guess there are a lot of people like me. I watch skilled individuals do their work and I come to the conclusion that they must know what they are doing and I can trust not only what they tell me but also their judgement.

And I mistrust those who talk a good game but don't get it done. They offer no surety and I avoid their counsel while muttering that talk's cheap.

Those that I trust most have moved beyond the science of their discipline and transformed what they do to art; they bring judgement, wisdom, experience, and intuition to what they do.

Declare Limits

The tested truth is that the more we know, the more we recognize we don't know. No one can be expected to know it all; everyone of us has limits. Those whom we trust declare what those limits are and avoid any temptation to bluff it or create false impressions.

In reality, we distrust individuals who pretend to have knowledge where they do not, who fake it, or who put on a mask to hide where they really are.

*He stands before us palms up
the weapons of blame and pretense
having been set aside
for a kinder engagement,
one that invites warm whispers
and the sharing of what is known
and what is still to be discovered
between us.*

These leaders recognize that by declaring what they don't know they become vulnerable ... but, in doing so, they are more accessible.

In a world like ours that has remarkable complexity, it is difficult, if not impossible, to trust people who believe that they have all the answers. The leaders that I trust declare that they haven't been able to figure something out and they describe where they are confused. That clean-cut openness invites others to join the leader in finding solutions.

Speak Clearly

How many times have you heard this? I know exactly where they are coming from; I may not like it all the time but there is nothing hidden. Have you also noticed the admiration that has been coupled with that assertion? The message between the lines is, "I can trust what they tell me."

Trustworthy people speak clearly; rarely do they beat around the bush or mask meaning and intention in jargon. When they offer credit, it is specific, clear, and genuine; when they offer criticism, it defines what is expected definitively. The message cannot be mistaken.

The most trusted leaders make meaning of what is happening — they describe the challenges that must be faced; they define the issues in a way that is unadorned. And then they spell out the implications of those challenges and issues in terms that are real to others.

Listen

As much as they speak, those we trust leave room for others; they listen. They know, as we know, that the act of listening communicates a willingness to learn. We become suspicious of individuals who are convinced that the way they have always done it is the way they should do it in the future. We trust those who have a desire to listen and learn what others know, think, or believe as well as what others have found to be better ways to solve problems and move the organization forward.

Winning The Future

Simply put, strategic planning is figuring out how to win the future. It allows you and your organization to

- identify what business you are in,
- determine what your organization wants to become,
- specify the moral benchmarks by which everyone in the organization will judge their behaviour, and
- decide how your vision of success will be achieved.

But those are only the broad brushstrokes of what a strategic plan means for an organization. The actual development process for a strategic plan is one that companies often overlook, make too complex, or approach without any degree of practicality.

For that reason, we offer a strategic planning process that asks teams to come to consensus on the answers to 20 fundamental questions. One of the end results is, of course, a strategic plan, but more importantly the developed strategic plan.

- provides analysis of your internal and external environment,
- compels you and other employees to think strategically about the opportunities, challenges, and problems the organization faces,
- is straightforward and practical and, therefore, more easily understood and implemented, and
- makes it easy for members of the organization to contribute to a successful future.

Strategic planning doesn't have to be mysterious and strategic plans don't have to be confusing and obscure.

They help shape the organization's day-to-day operations. They guide every action and decision. They offer a compelling vision of where the organization wants to find success. They help win the future.

For more information about our services, contact us at (519) 664-2213.