

Drive Out Fear

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Several decades ago, the now-deceased quality guru, W. Edwards Deming came up with a list of 14 key points for leaders to take that would accomplish what he called "profound knowledge." Point number 8 on his list was "drive out fear." I believe this was one of the most powerful concepts on his famous list. The reason is that the absence of fear is a prerequisite for higher trust, and trust is the most important ingredient to higher organizational productivity. In this article, I will share seven tips to help drive out fear.

Fear is one of the most basic of human instincts. It is fear that allowed humanoids to survive during primitive times, and it is still the basis of survival today. Without fear, you would not take the time to look both ways before crossing the street. Too much constraining fear in the organizational context can produce a gridlock of activities among the people that prevent the establishment of trust. Let's look at some tips that leaders can use to reduce the fear in the workplace, and thus help to increase trust.

Be more transparent

When people are kept in the dark about what things are happening that can affect them, it is only natural to become afraid. When leaders contemplate draconian actions in sealed conference rooms, the word spreads like fire in a tinderbox. Some future actions must not be shared for legal reasons, but in many cases leaders attempt to shelter people from possible actions because they do not want to cause panic. That attitude is false logic. More panic ensues from speculation than would be present if full disclosure was given.

Reinforce Candor

Praise rather than punish people for sharing their observations about inconsistencies. In most organizations, people do not believe it is safe to tell leaders the truth about their

observations. Their livelihood might be at stake. When leaders invite open dialog on sensitive issues and reinforce people who verbalize their fears, it tends to extinguish the rumor mill and build a foundation of higher trust.

Be Kind

Treating people with dignity and respect is nothing more than following the Golden Rule. If leaders consistently treated people the way they would like to be treated if the roles were reversed, there would be much less fear in the workplace. When people feel intimidated or bullied, they naturally cower in fear for what might happen to them.

Develop more Emotional Intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is your ability to understand emotions and your skill at being able to use that knowledge to manage yourself and your relationships with others. This skill allows leaders to act in ways that foster open dialog and lower fear. A very good book to help people gain higher EQ is *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* by Bradberry and Greaves.

Level with people

Be honest with people and let them know of any improvement opportunities in a supportive way. When people know you are sincerely trying to help them improve, they will be less fearful. Each person has some insecurity regardless of his or her history. Helping people grow is a great way to lower fear.

Care about others

Fear has a hard time growing in an environment where people truly care about each other. The expressions of empathy and sympathy when people are struggling mean they will feel supported in their darkest hours. They foster courage and faith that most problems are only temporary setbacks, and that life itself is an amazing journey.

Trust other people

When trust is present, fear has a hard time surviving. When leaders show that they have faith in the ability of people to do the right things, then they do not project a kind of "gotcha" environment that is evident in many organizations. The result is that people are not on edge wondering when the next outburst will occur.

The absence of unnecessary fear is a huge benefit for any organization. Some fear is good for the self preservation of individuals and organizations, but keeping it at the lowest possible level is liberating and will bring out the best in people.

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