



Stupid or Brilliant

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

I do a fun exercise in my leadership classes called "Stupid or Brilliant." I go through a number of scenarios and specify an action that, on the surface, appears to be stupid. In each case, the loss of control would appear to be devastating from a risk point of view. I ask the participants to vote if the action was stupid or brilliant.

There are some examples where there is a documented correct answer, but most of the questions can lead to lively debate. Here is an example of a question with a real answer.

A doughnut street vendor at the base of a skyscraper in New York City noticed that the line was too long while people waited for him to make change. He was losing customers. He put out a box with change and small bills and a sign that read "In a hurry? Make your own change: I trust you!" At first glance, putting money out in trust in NYC would be stupid. People could just take the cash and go. Instead, the vendor found the strategy to be brilliant for three reasons:

1. The throughput of his vending operation increased by 50% because the line moved faster.
2. People started talking about his trust throughout the building, and they came out to buy from this honest vendor.
3. Many people would not even take the change. If their total came to \$3.75, they would just put in a five dollar bill and walk away.

Other strategies for trusting people leave room for analysis. For example:

One consultant decided to charge only what the customer felt was appropriate after his work was done. He would leave the fee totally at the discretion of the people he was helping. This tactic defies negotiation logic because it ignores what is called the "call girl" principle of negotiation (the value of the service is greatly reduced after the service is rendered). Yet, this consultant generally did very well and often took away larger fees than he would have if he had negotiated a firm price before doing the work.

One organization was forced by market conditions to do some downsizing. They decided to allow the people being let go to continue to use their old office, computers, and cell phones for several months if they wanted while they looked for work elsewhere. Of course, there were a few stated rules about not being disruptive and honoring professional behaviors while on the premises, but other than that, the severed employees were treated the same as the ones retained. There was a risk, but the company found that in all but a few rare exceptions, the benefits far outweighed the risks.

You can carry blind trust to an extreme where a strategy is truly stupid. One example I give in my classes is this: The owner of a bar does not charge patrons per drink but asks each customer to keep track of what was consumed and pay at the end of the night. Obviously, most people vote for this as a "stupid" strategy. On the other hand, it would make an interesting experiment, because it may be possible that customers would pay more than required on average rather than pay less.

The point is that when we really do trust people to do the right thing, they often respond in ways that defy conventional wisdom. That logic is generally derived from a social norm based on a controlling philosophy. When given the chance, most people react with integrity and gratitude when we extend trust to them.

I have developed what I call the "First Law of Trust." It is: "If you are unhappy with the level of trust others have toward you, the first corrective action is to find ways to extend trust more to them." Trust is reciprocal in nature, so the best way to receive more trust is to give more. Try this technique with the people in your life, and you will see a dramatic increase in trust. Often what seems like an unwise risk to take will turn out to be rewarded by far greater loyalty than you can imagine.



Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at** www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763

