

## **Table Stakes**

**by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP**

There are many models for improved leadership that are very complex. My “Leadergrow Trust Model” is simple. It has only three parts. 1. Table Stakes, 2. Enabling Actions, and 3. Reinforcing Candor. I will tackle “Table Stakes” in this article. I’ll cover the other two in subsequent weeks.

In Las Vegas, if you play poker, you do not get dealt a hand unless you have an “ante” in the pot. You need some minimum investment before you can even play the game. The same phenomenon happens in leadership. You must be able to have some minimum characteristics before you can even begin to build trust as a leader.

For example, if you are not honest, it disqualifies you from building trust as a leader. Likewise, if you cannot communicate, be open, care about people, honor your commitments, be consistent, and other minimum standards of leadership behavior, you have no chance of building trust, and you’re basically locked out of the game. You might as well take off the uniform and hit the showers.

The “Table Stakes” are really prerequisites and act as the foundation upon which leaders build trust. “Table Stakes” are necessary, but not sufficient, to create trust. Without the foundation, trust is impossible.

When I work with organizations, we discuss what the “Table Stakes” are for that particular group, because they may be different for different industries. For example, in a hospital setting the table stakes may be somewhat different from those in a manufacturing environment.

Each group should spend a few minutes creating a short list of example table stake behaviors for leaders in their organization. The “Table Stakes” for a particular group may be difficult to discern. For example, what are the “Table Stakes” for political candidates where exaggeration, sensationalism, and rhetoric seem to be the expected behavior these days?

**Exercise for you today.** Spend some time thinking about the table stakes for your environment. As you lead your organization, what minimum standards of behavior are needed in order to have any chance of building trust within your group? Write down a list of the table stakes you identify and review it with your group to see what additional items they would recommend.

Naturally the next important step is to evaluate whether you actually abide by the “Table Stakes” at all times. This exercise is more difficult, because you must be brutally honest with yourself; no rationalizations. That is a tall order for any leader due to the immense pressure for performance on a continual basis.

If downplaying the impact of a customer issue creates a more favorable impression with the Board of Directors, does not the end justify the means? The answer is no; a lie is a lie. Be careful when you create your list of “Table Stakes,” because these will be the standards by which you measure your worthiness as a leader. The expectation is simple; “Table Stakes” must be adhered to 100% of the time or you lose the ability to build trust.

The concept of having “Table Stakes” for leaders is a simple one, but it is very important to recognize this and identify what those minimum standards are. Without them, there is no basis or foundation for building trust.

***The preceding was derived from an episode in “Building Trust,” a 30 part video series by Bob Whipple “The Trust Ambassador.” To view three short (3 minutes each) examples at no cost go to <http://www.avanoo.com/first3/517>***

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