



## Trust and Focus

### by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

I claim to be able to accurately determine the level of trust in a group by just observing the interactions of people in the group for about 10-30 seconds. It is not hard at all. You just have to pay attention to what people are saying.

If you observe a team, and people are talking about the vision they are trying to accomplish or the new product they are launching, then you are likely observing a high trust group. That is because their focus is outward on what they are trying to accomplish.

Instead, if you observe people at work and they are talking about each other, usually in negative or defensive terms, chances are good that team is a low trust group. If people are myopic and focus their energy inward defensively rather than outward with a positive attitude, it shows a lack of interpersonal trust.

Let's take the exact same condition going on within a manufacturing unit and eavesdrop on a short break room conversation:

**Low Trust Group** – No wonder we are falling behind, Fred and Margaret are more interested in their love affair than in doing their part of the work. We will never get there if they don't pull their load, but management is so clueless they don't see the problem.

**High Trust Group** – I think we are going to make the aggressive target for customer service this month. This will make three months in a row we have met their needs. Even though Fred and Margaret get starry-eyed sometimes, they are making a good contribution to production.

You don't need to be a PhD to accurately identify the level of trust in a group. Simply pay attention to the words being used on a daily basis. It is a dead giveaway that can be applied very quickly. You will find it to be remarkably accurate.

Try keeping track for a day by making hash marks on a 3X5 inch card. When you hear constructive comments about satisfying customers or pursuing the vision, put a mark on

the right side of the card. If you hear griping conversations about the other team members slacking off, or managers messing up, put the mark on the left side. At the end of the day, simply count up the marks, and you will have a good approximation of the trust level in that area.

It is not just the words but also the body language that shows the attitudes of people toward their fellow workers. It is very easy to detect supportive and positive feelings and even easier to see hatred or lack of care.

People working together day to day project their level of interpersonal comfort and trust, but most people ignore the signal. Now that you know the secret, pay attention to what people are saying and you will have better insights.

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