

## Successful Supervisor Part 20

### How to Measure Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Last week I wrote about the different kinds of trust. The essence of that article is that trust is far more complex, ubiquitous, and volatile than most of us realize. One question that often comes up is: how can we go about measuring trust? For supervisors, it is vital that they build and maintain trust within their group, but how can they tell how well they are doing?

You could go out among the employees and simply ask how much they trust you, but most of them would return with a blank stare because they have no idea what scale to use. I think a better method of measuring trust is how smoothly the operation is running. If trust is high, then most of the dysfunctional things people do other than work with high engagement will be absent. Here is a short list of the things you do not see people do when trust is high:

- Seek to get attention,
- Get away with goofing off,
- Cause disruption and trouble,
- Annoy their fellow workers,
- Undermine supervision,
- Blame others falsely,
- Skip necessary process steps, and
- Hundreds of similar maladies

If trust is high, then these problems are rare and productivity is high. There have been numerous [studies](#) that indicate high trust groups are two to five times more productive than low trust groups. Hence, one measure of the level of trust is simply how productive the work cell is working under the current supervisor.

Another interesting measure of trust is the level of turnover. All organizations face some level of turnover, and it can be devastating to the performance of an organization. It has been said that “Employees don’t leave the company; they leave their managers,” ([Jim Goodnight](#)). If a supervisor habitually has turnover higher than benchmark groups in the same industry, it is a sign of low trust. In organizations where trust is high, turnover is usually very low. For example,

Wegmans Food Markets work on a culture of high trust every day, and they typically score as one of the best places to work in the country. They enjoy a turnover rate usually lower than 8% in an industry that typically suffers more than 40% turnover annually.

Another way of describing the immense leverage of employee engagement as it relates to turnover is as follows: “It is not the employees who quit and leave that are the problem: it is the employees who [quit and stay](#).” Anytime a person is on the payroll and is not fully engaged in the work, it undermines the effectiveness of not only that person but everyone around him or her.

From a global perspective, Richard Edelman and his team distribute a study each year that measures the state of trust in 28 countries. They spend all year gathering statistics on trust and summarize them in the [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) every year. Trust is measured in four key areas as follows:

- Trust in Business
- Trust in Government
- Trust in the Media
- Trust in Non-Government Organizations (like the Red Cross, etc)

The Edelman Trust Barometer is a rich source of benchmark data that is available to supervisors to determine if their organization is doing well or not in the area of trust. Since the Edelman Trust Barometer is a huge worldwide database, I am often asked if there are not simpler and local instruments to measure trust within any group.

There are numerous trust surveys that can be used. I have developed one of my own, that I call the [“Leadergrow Trust Survey.”](#) The survey is available for free online. I have been using it for over 15 years to help organizations not only measure the level of trust but also dissect the different areas where specific behavioral issues can be holding the organization back.

Another way to measure the level of trust is simply to determine how well the current culture provides positive answers to basic questions such as:

- To what extent do people have the opportunity to grow in this organization?
- Do people feel safe and secure, or are they basically fearful?
- How do people treat each other on their own level and on higher or lower levels?
- Is the culture inclusive or exclusive?
- Do people generally feel like winners or losers at work?
- Is the culture one of reinforcement or punishment?
- Are supervisors viewed as enablers or barriers?

- Are people trying to get into the organization or trying to get out?
- What is the level of satisfaction for people in this organization?
- Can people “speak their truth” without fear of reprisal?
- Do people follow the rules or find ways to avoid following them?

The supervisor needs to be aware that the level of trust in her work group is most impacted by her own behaviors. If she always models the organization’s values, is perceived as fair and compassionate yet disciplined about applying rules, then that is a good foundation on which to build. Beyond that, being approachable, consistent, caring, flexible, open, energetic, positive, and many other adjectives will produce an environment in which trust can and will grow.

The ability to use a single instrument to measure trust and to apply that measure each year over a period of several years is a good way to track progress. The caveat is to not have the instrument be too burdensome, because people tend to rebel at filling out the same questionnaire each year. If they do not perceive progress or changes are being made, they will begin to give lower scores out of frustration.

Every supervisor should be given periodic training on how to build a great culture of trust. It is especially true with new supervisors. It is a crime that many worthy individuals find themselves in the role of supervisor and have never been formally trained on how to do it well. I believe no supervisor should be called upon to lead a group without at least 10 hours of leadership training. My own course is 20 hours, and I constantly struggle to fit in all of the content that needs to be shared with supervisors. I believe the training should be refreshed at least every other year, because that prevents supervisors from getting stale or obtaining suboptimal habits.

If you are a supervisor, ask yourself seriously when the last time you were given training on how to do your job more effectively. If it has been a few years, or you actually never were trained, then speak up and take a course in supervisory leadership. It will help you in numerous ways.

*This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on [www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision](http://www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision) or on this blog.*

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