

Successful Supervisor Part 82

Trust Improves Productivity

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

Every supervisor knows that productivity is a bottom-line measure that is the net result of the entire culture within her operation. Productivity takes everything into account and is a brutally honest reflection of the level of engagement of the workforce.

After studying trust for about 40 years, I believe that the level of trust within a group is an accurate predictor of the engagement of workers in the group and thus their productivity. I believe the average organization manages to extract only about 30% of the inherent productivity that is within the resources that are already onboard.

Even if I am wrong by quite a bit, it is still safe to say that any supervisor would be wise to first think about improving trust before requesting more resources to get the jobs done. In many of the organizations where I have worked, the productivity of the groups can be doubled and still have some headroom left before people are maxed out. That is why culture is often the sleeping giant in most organizations.

Let's examine why the lack of trust is such a drag on organizational productivity by describing just a few example reasons why the correlation is so high.

Trust increases productivity

The enemy of productivity is waste. Here I am not talking about physical waste, although that is also involved. I mean that when someone is not performing at peak capability, his or her spare capacity is waste to the organization. Here are four ways that trust improves productivity directly.

1. People abusing the rules

It is easy to spot time being wasted when you observe how many workers do not follow the prescribed rules of the organization. If the morning break is set for 15 minutes, you will see workers away from their functions for roughly twice that time or even more.

The same phenomenon occurs with lunch breaks and smoke breaks (if allowed at all).

With a culture of high trust, people follow the rules as cast because they understand why they are important.

2. Poorly trained workers

In many cases the training given to new employees is sketchy and incomplete. If workers do not know how to run the operation as designed, then not only are they going to cause waste, they will be in danger of becoming injured in certain circumstances.

In a culture of high trust, supervisors are fully aware and follow the rules of proper training.

3. Distracting conversations and arguments

It is easy to observe people in production jobs spending a lot of time bickering among themselves. Curiously much of the wasteful banter is about not having adequate resources to do the work. I once knew a worker who would spend at least 70% of his day griping about that there is not enough time to get his work done.

Higher trust means that people get along better and do not get distracted by useless bickering. This is because higher trust is the result of respectful behavior.

4. Poor setups and staging of materials

If the area has not been set up for maximum workflow using “lean” principles and proper supply chain methods, then the workers are subject to be “waiting for work” frequently, which is a pure form of waste.

A culture of high trust is based on running the operation as it was designed to operate without glitches and hassles.

Trust improves morale

Everyone feels better in an environment of high trust. Coming to work is not a burden; in fact, many people truly enjoy the camaraderie at work. Great supervisors are able to achieve a light and buoyant environment.

1. Supervisors have gained the respect of the workers

Workers in a culture of high trust recognize they are there to do a job, but they are happy to do it because of the respect they are shown by supervision. When people are properly led, they almost universally enjoy their work and do it with pride.

2. Workers participate and buy into the vision

Workers understand that their labors are for a reason, and that reason is to make a better future for themselves. They do not feel ignored or beaten; rather, they are enlivened by the challenges that are put before them.

3. Rewards are appreciated

As the workers perform well over time, the management effectively reinforces the good work and that helps perpetuate the excellent productivity.

Take the time to invest in a higher trust culture in your organization. You will see remarkable improvements in productivity as a result.

This is a part in a series of articles on "Successful Supervision." The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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