



The Scar Never Really Goes Away

by Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP

Most of us have had a miscommunication situation where another individual took umbrage at something we said. Let's suppose that the problem was truly a misinterpretation of what you meant and that you were able to go to the other person and set the record straight. Now the issue is behind you both, right? Wrong!

The problem is that, for deep wounds, the scar tissue never fully heals. Sure you are able to go on, forgiven for the gaffe, but there is always going to be a degradation of trust in the mind of the other person. Nothing either of you can say or do can totally erase the issue. So how can you proceed? Does this mean that every time there is an innocent mistake, irreparable damage is done. Thankfully no!

The trick is to acknowledge the gaffe, work to heal the ill feelings as much as possible, then seek other trust building techniques to more than make up for the permanent loss due to the slip up. Actually, if you both work at it, the trust can come out higher than ever before, even though the scar is still there. It is as if the rest of the skin around the scar has become so strong and beautiful that even though there is still an imperfection, it is overridden by the surrounding area.

Think of a merger situation where one party inadvertently left some assets off a list. In the due diligence process, the error was discovered by the other party. The relationship can never be exactly the same as it was before the situation occurred, but with the proper rehabilitation, the trust can actually come out stronger than before. This situation can be more complex than I am representing here because it might be the accused person who is feeling the betrayal rather than the accuser, since the mistake was an honest oversight. It all depends on the situation and the temperament of the individuals.

The same remedial logic is operational if the betrayal was due to an actual deception rather than a misunderstanding. In these cases, the scar tissue is particularly deep, and it may be impossible to repair the damage, despite the effort. Many people at work or organizations that have merged know the pain of a complete collapse of trust. In serious cases, trust never does come back, and the individuals live with the duplicity or agree to go their separate ways.

A falling out in the work environment, whether justified or not is something that removes huge amounts of built-up trust. Good dialog and a conscious attempt to set the record straight are excellent first steps, but we need to go beyond these remedies to make the main focus of the relationship be the positive forward aspects instead of scars from the past. This means seeking out ways to generate more trust over an extended period of time.

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