



Trust is Bilateral

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

My daughter taught me a vital lesson about trust when she was four years old. I used to travel a lot for work, and when I would come home exhausted from a week on the road, she would run up to me and shout “Daddy, Daddy, twirl me.” I would grab hold of her little wrists being careful to not jerk them, and rotate backward lifting her off the ground. She would laugh and giggle as I rotated her around for 15 seconds, then when I set her down, she would always say “Again!” So I would pick her up and do it all over. The lesson she taught me is that of all the times I twirled her, I hardly ever dropped her. Because she was trusting me with her life, I was compelled to rise to that level of trustworthiness and protect her.

The lesson she taught me was that trust is bilateral. If we want to receive more trust in our lives, we need to find ways to show more trust in other people. I have come to call this phenomenon “The First Law of Trust.” If you are not happy with the level of trust you are seeing from other people, the first thing to do is find ways to show more trust in them. That may seem illogical, but it actually works. Trust given to others reflects back to us every time.

A conundrum for leaders is that not all employees are trustworthy. Surely I am not recommending that a leader trust someone who has consistently shown that he or she is not capable of rising to an acceptable level of performance. Of course not! You would not trust a young biology student to perform open heart surgery on you. Instead you can find some way to extend some measure of trust that the person can achieve. You might trust the biology student to complete his homework assignment tonight.

With reinforcement and shaping of behavior, I believe it is possible to make solid gains over time toward more trustworthy behavior. Enough assignments along with specific training in school and as an intern means eventually the young student can be trusted to perform surgery.

The exercise for today is to find several ways you can show higher trust in other people. Often very small gestures can make a big difference in starting a new momentum of trust between people. For example, you might allow them to try something that previously you always did yourself. You don't need to take reckless chances with the extension of trust, but do allow your creativity to think about what might be a reasonable way to show higher trust.

Extending more trust is one of the best ways to obtain more trust yourself. Most people forget this simple rule. Even when it seems people cannot be trusted, if you find small ways to show more trust in them, they will inevitably rise up and become more trustworthy. Try it, and you will see great progress in your relationships.

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 www.avanoo.com/first3/517

