

Trust

There are two ways you can trust. But which way will you go?

by Paul Bridle, Leadership Methodologist

I have spoken to many leaders asking them what characteristics they think are important for a leader. I have always been fascinated by the responses. They all use different words and ways of defining it. But I think I can safely say that “trust” is always in there somewhere.

But in reality, many people in leadership positions don't think of what they need to be, and to do, in order to win and gain trust from their people. Trust is something that is fostered and built between people.

What is Trust?

The dictionary says:

1. Reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence.
2. Confident expectation of something; hope.
3. A person on whom, or thing on which, one relies

The problem with defining trust as ‘confidence’ is that people assume that confidence is always positive. I can have confidence in something that is not necessarily positive or even acceptable to me or my standards. For example, a teacher can have confidence in Jonny not doing his homework today. Why? Because Jonny never does his homework on a Monday. I am absolutely confident that my friend will be late for dinner tonight. Why? Because he always is.

This is not positive. In fact it is a confidence that is opposite to the desire of the person being confident. This happens a lot with Managers and of course Politicians. People trust that the Manager will shout and rant and make a scene when he comes in because he always does when this sort of problem arises.

My point is this, trust is there because there is confidence based on previous consistent behaviours. The behaviours aren't necessarily good or positive behaviours.

So what do we mean when we say that one of the important qualities of a leader is ‘trust’?

It is interesting to see people's beliefs about trust and how it effects their behaviours. Some people give trust too quickly whilst others ration their trust and need absolute surety and an iron clad guarantee, before they trust someone. Some people see it as a weakness to be trusting and others see it as a reflection of themselves if they don't easily trust people. There is no right or wrong. In fact, in each case it often tells you more about that person.

However, I think that leaders recognize that people have different perceptions and beliefs about trust and, respect others positions and are prepared to work at developing trust with them. So ‘trust’ is something we develop with people – knowing that each person has different levels of trust and what is needed with one is not necessarily what works with another.

Having said this, leaders also have a healthy respect for people that give away trust too quickly and for those that are not prepared to give it away at all.

Somebody who gives it away too quickly may well be easily led and unreliable. They also may trust the wrong people and often are not willing to challenge. At the other end of the spectrum, those that do not give trust easily are often narrow in their focus and can be rigid in their ways.

Of course there is a point when it is not worth the effort to work at developing the trust. This especially applies in business where there is such demand to move quickly and achieve results. But leaders know about the critical mass effect of trust. Once there is a critical mass, the effort becomes easier.

For example, a leader has built up trust with a team of ten people: seven trust the leader absolutely - almost blindly now. These are the people that will only notice what confirms their trust; two trust with a level of objectivity – these will continue to do so unless something really significant comes along to shake that trust; one trusts with a level of cynicism – there is mounting evidence of the merits of trusting this person but there is also a belief that it is not fully tested yet.

So this leader has worked at building a good level of trust with these individuals and has been successful. Now a new person arrives. The leader tries to build trust with this

individual but despite all efforts, they simply are unable to do it. The person will not allow the relationship to go down that route.

The critical mass kicks in, and the leader no longer needs to make a great deal of effort. The people who the leader already has developed a ‘trust’ relationship with will rally behind the leader and defend him or her from the new person.

So this month my questions are:

First of all:

What type of person are you?

Are you one that gives away trust too easily, or are you the person that never gives it at all?

How much is your approach getting in the way of relationships and influencing your behaviour in a way that is not in your best interest?

How do you need to adjust your current approach to trust to have a better quality of relationships and life?

Secondly:

How good are you at working to develop trust with people?

Do you not bother at all?

Do you work too hard at it?

Both are not acceptable in successful leaders.

What do you need to do to fine tune and hone your ability to develop trust with people in a way that works for both parties and enhances your leadership ability?

I hope you have found this useful and thanks again for your emails and I welcome your thoughts on subjects for future Thoughts on Leadership. Have a great month and best wishes

Paul



Paul Bridle has studied effective organizations and the people that lead them for two decades. Paul looks at things from a different perspective and is a big believer in the power of asking challenging questions. His research takes him across the globe which enables him to have a truly global perspective on leadership and the way businesses are moving forward.